Education Beyond Politics: A Symposium

1992

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COMMENT

The Poet as Celebrity Biographies are getting fatter. The last three I have read – of Orwell, Kafka, and Anne Sexton – are swollen with detail, plus a wealth of social and psychological interpretations, in a spectacular display of minute and inexhaustible research. Nothing is left out, and everything is put in. Is it the triumph of the academic?

The biography of Anne Sexton by Diane Middlebrook is an example of the use of academic methods in dealing with a non-academic subject. This makes for both good and bad biography. It is good insofar as we are given so much information about Sexton's life, the origins of her poems in her life, her career, her poet friends, her admirers, her family, her marriage, her children, her sexual escapades, and, above all, her mental illness and frequent breakdowns, her attempted suicide, and her several bouts with therapists. On the other hand, there is a semblance of biographical overkill. How much do we have to know about Sexton's life and the particulars surrounding her work?

However, in this kind of absolute coverage, the book does raise a number of questions, though implicitly, not explicitly. By its recounting of every poetic maneuver, every poetic posture, every twist and turn of the world of poetry, Middlebrook creates a sense of adulation of poets and poetry that almost takes the medium out of the realm of ordinary literature. Poets become gods and goddesses, not just writers, like those who pursue fiction and criticism. The atmosphere becomes one of burning incense to poetry. It is a kind of adulation by versification.

In this process, there is very little reference to the social and political milieu in which all this rarified creation takes place, except for a few clichéd references to the anti-Vietnam War movement and to the Republican demons. Very few fiction writers, besides Bellow and Hemingway, are mentioned. And the only critics referred to were teachers at Brandeis. Hence, Sexton's poetry, and poetry in general, exist without a background or context.

Another problem raised implicitly, but not critically, is Sexton's unappeasable ambition, and her relishing of her status as a celebrity. This unanalyzed version of the media world reaches its peak when Sexton's poems are put to some kind of musical expression by a popular band. In general, her pursuit of her "career," like what Sexton refers to as her "madness," does get out of hand occasionally.

On the whole, Middlebrook is not critical of Sexton's exploitation of her "madness" by taking advantage, to the point of abusing, her relations with her children and her husband, as well as with most of her friends and fellow poets. But Middlebrook does not hide or underplay

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the unpleasant facts. Still, there is a slight implication that Sexton's self-indulgent behavior, sexually and morally, is not to be seen too harshly, because she was a writer, a poet. There is not enough condemnation, I feel, of both Sexton and one of her therapists, for having an affair while she was in treatment.

Middlebrook's portrait of Sexton's life also revives another question, much debated in the past by psychoanalysts and a few critics, about the relation of literature and the literary life to pathology. In Sexton's case, the relation can be seen to be more crucial because so much of her poetry expresses her pathology. Theoretically, the question, as it has been formulated, is whether art is a direct vehicle of neurosis, or whether neurosis is something to be overcome. Lionel Trilling, it will be recalled, maintained that art is achieved by the healthy side of a neurotic personality. Others have argued a more organic connection between the two components. My own view is that the answer depends on how the question is framed, for I think both approaches are correct.

Obviously, madness in itself does not produce literature. But the content of a writer's work – insofar as it can be separated from the form – is shaped to some extent by the warp in the writer's vision. Sexton, herself, referred to the "unconscious" element in her poetry, by which she meant her elemental feelings and images, that is, her "madness," and to the editing of her writing by her "ego," by which, I assume, she meant her critical faculty, which goes hand-in-hand with the so-called creative faculty in every serious writer.

Given all this incorporation of her "madness" in her poetry, the question of how great a poet Sexton was naturally arises. I leave the final judgment to her fellow poets and to the history of poetry. But I might say, in the meantime, that her gifts were large but not always sufficiently controlled. Compared to Robert Lowell, for example, to whom she often has been compared, because of the confessional style they shared, it seems clear that Lowell was superior, not only because of the greater magic of his language, but also because of his stricter control of the medium. I should say that despite my reservations about the side effects of this biography of Sexton, it is in many respects an impressive book. We get a forceful picture of the achievements and sufferings of Anne Sexton. Not only does it tell us everything we could possibly want to know about Sexton's sad life and partially redeeming work, it also is loving of its subject, something which, it seems to me, is essential to the most persuasive biography, and while it is not overtly critical, it does supply the basis for judgment.

W. P.

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Education Beyond Politics

On March 6, 1992, we invited a number of people to continue the discussions we started at our conference, "The Changing Culture of the University," the proceedings of which were published in *Partisan Review* in the spring issue of 1991. This time, we invited persons who, for the most part, had been known as "leftists" but had come out publicly against what recently has come to be called the "politically correct" line. Our participants belonged to different disciplines, had had different experiences, but shared a concern about the future of American education. And they appeared to fear the effects of teaching fictitious histories and abstruse theories to innocent students – in the universities and other educational institutions. Everyone at this meeting had come out in one way or another against fashionable academic trends and had decided to examine why, in the name of democracy, some of our democratic institutions are being undermined.

In order to get into these issues, I formulated a number of questions. Some of the participants addressed these extemporaneously; others spoke from prepared papers, and yet others gave us their notes after the meeting. In the following pages, I relied primarily on the transcript but inserted written remarks as well, in order to relate all of the ideas we touched on while assessing the state of our various educational systems and groping for concrete and useful recommendations. These were the questions I asked the participants to think about before we met:

1. We all appear to agree that there is an even stronger anti-intellectual drift than ever before. How do we go about reversing it? If, as some say, a reversal already is in progress, how do we go about pushing this reversal into high gear?

2. If we separate the "politically correct" into proponents and followers, how can we detach the latter from the former?

3. Can we counter the "politically correct" position without engaging the politics behind it? And to what extent are these politics internal to the universities or coming from outside?

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4. How do we get the media to understand that their mediation between the activists and the public itself bypasses one of the basic issues – that is, the fact that even before this debate erupted educational content had been at a low ebb?

5. How can we persuade people that we are not simply defending a conservative point of view but are thinking of the enormous repercussions on the entire society when the potential work force is undereducated, when eighty percent of graduate students in mathematics and the sciences are foreigners, and when businesses cannot find secretaries who can spell or middle managers who can function in their jobs – on the level of their German, French, or Japanese counterparts?

6. How do we counter the teaching of relativism and so-called multiculturalism at the expense of tradition and cultural consensus, the teaching of "fictional" history at the expense of historical inquiries?

7. How do we deal with the already existing trickle-down effect of the low level of learning by those who now are teaching in elementary and secondary education?

a. Can we come up with incentives to motivate them to go back to school?

b. Or can such an end be achieved, on a large scale, only after we have helped turn the present tide?

8. Without denying that what we teach does have implicit political content, how can we take nitty-gritty politics out of the classroom, promote open education and just plain thinking?

To get the discussion off the ground on the day of the meeting, I started with the following remarks.

Edith Kurzweil: Today, we want to address possible courses of action, or suggestions, to point in directions that might help pull our universities out of their self-destructive impulses. Therefore, I want to be a bit polemical, to sharpen the outlines of the larger questions, the context in which our universities function.

As we know, public discussions sooner or later end up blaming the family, elementary, secondary, undergraduate or graduate education for the problems within the university as well as for the general malaise of

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our society, the lowering of standards, crime, punishment, drug abuse, etc. By pushing blame and guilt up and down the ladder it is possible to avoid all action. But ultimately the buck stops at the university level: that is where we have the choice of doing remedial work, of failing those who can't make the grade – whatever we determine that grade to be – or of lowering standards in order to fool ourselves. And only when some of us teach abroad and notice the inordinately higher levels of knowledge attained by the average university student, or when we read the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) report on the subject, are we forced to confront how watered-down our curricula have become. (I am not talking of some of the pockets of excellence in specific programs.)

Now that presidential campaigning has begun in earnest, more than ever, it seems to me, the state of education is highlighted as a central topic – if not of substance then of rhetoric and promises: whether or not to funnel student aid to good students or avoid linking such aid to performance; whether or not to award scholarships in line with minority status; whether or not to take money away from science linked to defense expenditures; whether to support or oppose the use of federal funds for fetal-tissue research. All of these loaded issues, though played out primarily at the university levels, address voters all along the political spectrum; and as the political campaign heats up, all of education is bound to become an ever larger political football in what I might call the macro arena.

If, in fact, substantive policies to reverse the unfailing trend toward mediocrity should ensue from these politically-fueled polemics, such policies inevitably will be implemented by more layers of administrators. Even if successful, these at best will have a trickle-down effect. And it will take time to change what happens in all of our schools, in what I might call the micro arena. There, entrenched bureaucrats have tenure, are difficult to influence and even more difficult to dislodge. Nevertheless, some things are happening: programs to raise the level of literacy by such groups as the Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. are functioning – although these prove what many deny, that, for instance, in New Jersey, 800,000 Americans can't read; NEH-supported programs are in place and help improve teachers' knowledge and performance; outreach efforts of all sorts try to raise the level of expectation for American students – to lift them in order to compete with their counterparts in France, Japan, Germany, and elsewhere. It behooves us to encourage such programs.

I would like us to address how we could help accelerate such efforts, how we might be able to have the macro input bring about changes on the micro levels. It is my sense that those of you who are here, and those who have said to us that they wished they had the time to be here, have

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become engaged as citizens, as individuals who no longer want to stand by and allow good intentions to deteriorate even further into bad policies. The question is not only whether or not "political correctness" is or is not a problem – which is how it is played out at the macro level between Republicans and Democrats, and by the media – but whether or not our students are being prepared to function in an increasingly competitive global context, in a world that no longer puts Americans at the genuine advantage we are accustomed to enjoy.

It is by way of education alone, by way of training kids from early on to think logically rather than emotionally, to evaluate information and facts within their contexts (however difficult it may be to be objective) rather than from ideological perspectives, that they will turn into responsible citizens. On the one hand, we have gotten used to addressing issues such as gun control, crime, illiteracy, drug addiction and a host of other social problems separately – if only because they must be dealt with in that fashion. On the other hand, we keep hearing that these problems themselves, as a result of the excesses of the 1960s, have enshrined "me-ism" and "looking out for number one," and that these attitudes have become the norm. Thus ethical expectations on both macro and micro levels have sunk to their lowest ebb.

We all know that parents are supposed to teach their kids to distinguish right from wrong and that teachers are to take over where parents fail. Since we no longer can be certain that either parents or teachers are able to differentiate properly, we are confronted with having to question accepted mores in the process of imparting knowledge. If we try to do so by way of the media, which seems to be the only means of reaching large sectors of the population, we will be subject to talking in sound bites, and soon become part of the problem. If we proceed through setting examples, or through individual therapy, we will not be able to reach many people. What is to be done? Obviously, whatever it is, it must happen in all of our schools. Thus we're back to square one.

Last month, in a talk for the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, Peter Berger argued that sociology lost its way, and its legitimacy, when it abandoned objectivity and rationality, and became trivialized and ideologized – often in the name of the people it studied and whom it set out to help. This is precisely what has happened to our system of public education. How then do we get it back on track, and in the process heal the rifts that have grown ever wider through interest-group politics, through confusing knowledge with politics, and merit with representation? Clearly, change can come about only through input on the micro level which, however, needs the support of large sectors of the macro institutions that set the priorities.

Whereas I realize that nothing can be done without large infusions

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of funds, I am convinced that our problems in first line are moral and ethical: we need liberal values without knee-jerk liberalism; humane treatment of all citizens driven by humanistic principles rather than guilt. And we must get people to realize that those of us who believe that with rights there come responsibilities are, in fact, concerned citizens rather than reactionaries or simply too old to understand. I myself would like my grandchildren, and everyone else's, to have the opportunities I was offered when I came to New York as a young refugee: to get a free and excellent education which, when I didn't handicap myself, allowed me to grow and develop.

Some of you may want to speak directly to fighting political correctness; others may want to focus on the value of restoring history, philosophy or mathematics as central subject matter, and at specific age levels; and yet others may want to address various means of re-education. In any event, I expect us all to argue sharply, to help clarify some of these issues, and, if possible, to suggest directions for future action. Who wants to go first?

Jean Elshtain: I would like to address several of Edith's questions. Education always has political implications, at least in the social sciences and in the humanities. But that is not the issue here. Instead, it is politicization. It's politicization that has crept in under an exclusive ideological rubric, which has met no paradox, no irony, no ambiguity, and permits certainly no counterargument. This position combines cynicism with naiveté, leads to dogmatism in the classroom and silliness in the polis. Of course moral and political issues belong in classrooms – but as debate and inquiry, not as dogma.

I'll give an example of how this type of dogmatism might work. (I'm sure each of us has examples.) Imagine a university teacher of nineteenth century British literature who presents a syllabus which excludes George Eliot. I daresay that there would be a hue and cry; a delegation might appear and point to this remarkable omission; and the department chair would pay a visit. He or she would ask whether this was due to sexism, or whether there was some rationale for this selection. And the professor would have to answer for this startling exclusion. But consider another case that isn't hypothetical, but is known to me personally. A graduate student in English told me that with the blessing of her advisor, she had completed her comprehensive exams, was working toward her degree, and she was going to offer a course on the nineteenth-century British novel which excluded all male writers. I didn't know what to say, but temporized, "Dickens too?" She said, "Yes," and told me that this was a woman-identified course and that no men were being read. Such a stance is immunized from challenge because it is part of a larger

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ideology which dictates that the entire world, universities included, is engaged in an updated form of class struggle, divided into dominators and victims. Let's take power away from the dominators; don't read them; that'll teach them. This is a world then of *a priori* ideology, which immunizes it from challenge. Of course there may be many reasons to teach a course on women's literature, but there are no good reasons to teach a course on the nineteenth-century novel whose entire *raison d'etre* is to get even with Charles Dickens.

Unfortunately, as one critic wrote recently, "Silence and repression are our answer to the stress of ethnic pluralism. Forced to wear the hair shirt of timidity and reticence," university students grow resentful, and hostility and bitterness erupts in the form of attacks which often, as you know, have racial motivations. We are "creating enclaves that are irreducibly, irretrievably uniform." The general proliferation of demands for sensitivity, backed up in some instances with restrictive speech codes and the like, speaks to a larger problem in America with litigiousness and spite, where we think we can legislate everything. It's not surprising that the university has moved along these lines. It also points to a disguised return, a return in benevolence's clothing of the old *in loco parentis* rule. But I'd rather take *in loco parentis* straight than have it emerge in this form. We're getting, I think, a kinder, gentler form, a manipulated form of what pop culture would call despotism. We assume that students are quivering infants who can't take care of themselves and lack the ability to engage in conversation, dialogue, and robust debate in a ruled, governed atmosphere with their fellow students and teachers in a community of scholars and learners.

We can't attempt to micro-manage every thought and deed, but I think we can create an atmosphere within which debate is welcomed, not shunned, within which differences as articulated positions, on the level of ideas, not wounded identities, are helped to flourish – where students, teachers, learners, and citizens are marked both by what divides and what unites us. To teach students takes on, also, the possibility of a common culture, which is neither uniform nor conformist, and the possibility of a liberal education, by which I mean not merely acquiring information or solidifying a group identity but, in the words of Michael Oakeshott, "learning to recognize some specific invitations to encounter particular adventures in human self-understanding." And, finally, the possibility for genuine diversity, by contrast to those entrenched and reapplied social and gender exclusivities which deny us the most cherished of all fragile achievements, our individuality, and as central to our individuality, to create together a commonality and even, I daresay, from time to time, solidarity.

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Abigail Thernstrom: I wonder whether we're really brainwashing students in an unfortunate political and intellectual culture, whether students really are that malleable. The broader American culture doesn't seem to be that threatened. I've been as distressed as anybody by the messages of Leonard Jeffries and company. But how many classrooms are we talking about, and how many teachers of history are being warped by these messages? We ought to distinguish between what's going on in the elite universities and what's going on in the run-of-the-mill institutions of higher education. In addition, when I talk on issues related to race I often am struck by the fact that black students appear genuinely terrified of an open intellectual and political culture: that they feel in need of protection. They're not making it up. I don't think they have been brainwashed to feel this, but it's a reality we must confront.

Jean Elshtain: For me the issue is not whether we, or the people I'm criticizing, are brainwashing students. I'm more concerned about atmospheres that promote a kind of silence on a whole range of issues, which many of us around this room, for instance, have failed to raise for fear of being labeled or of transgressing some unspoken boundary. For instance, in a women's studies course, we all know what can be talked about and what can't be talked about on a whole range of issues, from abortion on down. The wider issue that counts seems to be the difference of being female or of belonging to a definable ethnic group, race and so on. But we differ also because we have different positions and are free to debate them. That to me is central to democracy, rather than strong group identity, even though individuals' positions are, if you will, in large part shaped by the fact that they're male rather than female or black rather than white. This sense of putting you back inside your own skin is, I think, more pervasive and deeply problematic. I'm not as disturbed by brainwashing as much as by the notion that, finally, what we amount to is our race and gender rather than our individuality.

Abigail Thernstrom: The question is, precisely who believes it? Most students? *Some* students?

Jean Elshtain: A lot of students believe it.

Roger Kimball: I agree that students grow up with healthy doses, sometimes unhealthy doses, of cynicism and skepticism. Quite apart from the question of brainwashing, however, is the problem that many grow up not knowing anything. They aren't taught anything. That seems to be the fundamental issue, quite apart from whether they swallow all of

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the ideology. Many of them don't. But to use your phrase, this combination of naiveté and cynicism is not a good prescription for a healthy citizenry. Also, you said we should distinguish between the leading institutions and other institutions. There is a distinction to be drawn there, but it seems to me the second- and third-rung institutions have no greater amibition than to emulate the elite institutions. The way they accomplish this is by hiring the graduate students and the younger professors away from the elite institutions. They are never happier than when imitating the greatest excesses of the Dukes, the Yales, the Princetons, and so on.

In his prepared paper, Roger Kimball elaborated: We are all familiar with the horror stories: the stories about teachers who teach history as a battle for ethnic pride or political re-education, administrators who seek to inculcate virtue by outlawing the expression of unfashionable opinions, and professors who assure us that the possession of a high level of melanin is a necessary presupposition of superior mental development. I will take for granted that we need not spend the day agonizing over whether the phenomena of multiculturalism and political correctness are problems. Whatever differences of opinion may separate us, we know that we are facing a serious problem in our schools and universities, and we can be most productive if we work toward establishing some common ground.

We should begin by abandoning the myth of the middle. It is common in gatherings like this for speakers to position themselves in this realm of indeterminate moderation, speciously distinguishing themselves from caricatured versions of the right and the left. As the English critic William Hazlitt recognized, this procedure is both intellectually dishonest and needlessly divisive. In his essay on the "common-place critic," Hazlitt lampooned this timid creature, the common-place critic, who searches for truth in the middle, "between the extremes of right and wrong." There are some issues – and the battle over multiculturalism and political correctness is one – that cannot be decided by splitting the difference. One must take a stand.

There is the related problem of rhetoric. The temptation to position oneself in a specious middle ground on these issues is exacerbated by the high rhetorical stakes involved. Like most modern tyrannies, the dictatorship of the politically correct freely uses and abuses the rhetoric of virtue in its effort to enforce conformity and silence dissent. This is part of what makes it so seductive. How gratifying to know that one is automatically on the side of virtue! How heartwarming to know that one is enlisted in the party of history! Who wants to declare himself a partisan of reaction? Who isn't on the side of innovation?

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The problem is that such terms have all but lost their meanings – more precisely, they have often come to mean more or less the opposite of what they once meant. For example, genuine innovation in education today would look a lot more "conservative" and traditional than it did forty years ago. This makes things difficult for those who cherish the label of liberalism as much as they champion its reality. But we must recognize that the union of moralism and radicalism, while hardly a novel marriage, is particularly destructive in an institution dedicated to intellectual inquiry. Not only does it foster an atmosphere of intimidation and encourage tepid intellectual conformity, it also attacks the very basis for the free exchange of ideas.

There is a more general consideration. Advocates of radical multiculturalism pretend that the enemies of multiculturalism are reactionary ideologues who are attempting to suppress diversity and new ideas. Yet the real battle is not between radicals and conservatives but between radicals and what we might call old-style liberals. Or perhaps one should say that the classical liberal position – which fought for such ideas as factual accuracy, disinterested scholarship, and for advancement according to merit, not adherence to a given political line – is now regularly castigated as "conservative" and "reactionary." In this context, it is instructive to note that many commentators with impeccable left-liberal credentials regard the invasion of multiculturalism as an unmitigated educational disaster.

Consider, for example, Irving Howe, not exactly everyone's idea of a conservative thinker. Responding to a well-known female professor's complaint that the classics of Western culture did not address her experience, Howe witheringly asked: "Why should they? And more to the point, can her experience address the classics? One . . . reason for reading the classics is that they widen and deepen our experience, pulling us out of the all-too-visible limits that any single self is likely to have. Precisely the 'irrelevance' of the classics is what makes them relevant." Today, alas, Howe's commonsensical plea for tradition would be rejected as hopelessly elitist, sexist, ethnocentric, etc. Arthur Schlesinger's new book on multiculturalism, *The Disuniting of America*, has been treated to similar abuse. At a recent meeting of the American Federation of Teachers in Los Angeles, one prominent academic radical and proponent of "diversity" condemned Mr. Schlesinger's book as right-wing propaganda in sophisticated packaging, telling his audience that it belonged "in the ashcan."

My conclusion is simply that whatever local differences we may entertain, the problems posed by radical multiculturalism and political correctness are too serious to cede because of a concern about political labels. It wasn't long ago that we were assured that the "end of history"

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was nigh: that a Western-style liberalism was on the verge of establishing itself the world over and that peace and amity were breaking out everywhere. But instead of that attractive version of the end of history, we are now witnessing what some have called the retribalization of the world: a violent turn against Western liberalism and its tradition of rationality, respect for individual rights, and affirmation of a common good that transcends the accidents of ethnic and racial identity. The demands for radical multiculturalism and political correctness are academic coefficients of such phenomena, and they can be effectively met only by a frank and nonpartisan recognition of their reality.

Wilson Moses: I think this point about the leading institutions is quite correct. Post-modernist multiculturalism is based in the Ivy League schools and influenced by deconstructionism, feminism, and gay studies. But Afrocentrism is primarily a response to the emotional needs of faculty and students and parents in innner-city schools and colleges. A desire to respond to the needs of working-class, heterosexual black males is one of the reasons for the Afrocentric emphasis on the personalities of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, who stressed capital accumulation and traditional family values. Afrocentrism does not appeal to the "politically correct" majority of Ivy League students or the black studies establishment in Ivy League schools. I would not want to give the impression that black nationalism is a masculinist movement. One of its more radical proponents is Frances Cress Welsing, certainly no friend of the politically correct. Such black conservative women as Elizabeth Wright and Janice Ratteray have been openly sympathetic to Garveyite and Afrocentric agendas and to working-class black males.

Afrocentrism is not deemed "politically correct" by the powers within the multiculturalist movement. Afrocentrists are tranditionalists; their opponents are post-modernists and left-liberals. Afrocentrists have advocated separate schools for males and females. They work closely with parents' groups and want to see children attending school in uniform – blazers for the boys, plaid skirts for the girls. Teachers' unions have often opposed the aims of black nationalists and Afrocentrists. At the elementary school level, Afrocentrists also have a commitment to religious values and support religious education – Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic. Black nationalists are more comparable to Hasidic Jews than to the politically correct left-liberals. I found it not surprising that so many black nationalists, conservatives, and religious fundamentalists supported the nomination of Clarence Thomas. He had no support on the Ivy League campuses, but Louis Farrakhan supported him. Afrocentrism has little to do with the politically correct multiculturalism at the Ivy League universities. Its agenda is entirely different.

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Edith Kurzweil: It seems to me that once more we're getting into the discussion among the academics, and the students are falling between the cracks. I wouldn't know where to locate Rutgers University, which has a bit of everything. Certainly students know absolutely nothing about some of our debates, but some of them don't get much of an education as a result. When they're being led into liberal education in a state university, we're trying to pull them up to an elite level, but we're educating students who are essentially undereducated when they come in. They are not aware of the discussions that are taking place in what we might call the higher realms. These take place among the professors. What the students take away is something else. And simplification is rampant, on both sides.

Jean Elshtain: I taught for fifteen years at a non-elite school – a big public institution, the University of Massachusetts. Students come in bewildered, seeking some kind of identity and then, in a sense, are pushed into an identity by some faculty telling them how they are to be defined. That's the word I hear when I go to different campuses, when I see enclaves where students are bristling with suspicion of one another and are being encouraged in this by at least some of the faculty some of the time. And what suffers is their education. They come in with educational deficits, and more stupidity is being promoted.

Edith Kurzweil: Yes, I can testify to that. When I look at the transcripts of some students about to graduate I see that they've had black women's history, that their literature requirement was fulfilled by black women's writing, and so on, and that they have not had a single course in either European or American history.

Abigail Thernstrom: The kids come in knowing so little, and with Al Shanker being here, I'm not going to give all the reasons. But it seems to me that is the problem.

Edith Kurzweil: Well, this is what we've come here to discuss. These are the problems. Is there anything we can do about them? Al Shanker has been writing about some of this in his column.

Al Shanker: Since Abigail just mentioned one of the reasons, let me just say that what happens in elementary and secondary schools is largely determined by the standards set by higher education. Perhaps a good way of looking at this is to go back to just after the turn of the century, when some of the elite colleges approached Andrew Carnegie and told

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him that he'd already made many important contributions to the educational system, but that he could make another one by setting up a portable pension system, so that professors could move from one institution to another. Carnegie turned it down, saying that he'd be perfectly willing to do it for these fine institutions but didn't want to sit in judgment on all the fly-by-night and phony colleges across the country. They said, "Why don't you just provide this pension for those universities that accept only students who've had four years of math and two years of history and four years of English?"

He did, and that was the Carnegie unit. It would determine the structure of high schools, and it was all put in there to develop a standard for the Teachers' Insurance and Annuity Association. Once that was established as the college entry standard, it became the structure of the high schools. People kept asking, "What are these stupid Carnegie units about? Why does everything in high school have to be structured in that way?" But once colleges and universities gave up their admission standards – ninety-five percent of them today no longer select students, they recruit them – there no longer were standards. Once upon a time there were College Entrance Examination boards, there were New York State Regents Examinations. They still exist but are no longer required. Youngsters don't have to take them. Colleges don't require them, and they have been very watered down. Essentially, once colleges announce what they require teachers start saying, "Well then, we have to prepare students for that." They ask, "In what grade do we prepare them? And what are the elementary school teachers responsible for?" Textbooks then have to reflect this. Once ninety-five percent of the institutions say, "If you're alive and breathing at age eighteen we want you, as long as you pay the tuition, or can get somebody to pay for you," the entire curriculum then becomes very, very flexible. It really means the curriculum is a matter of choice, not just for each district, but for each teacher.

It does something else, too. I was very surprised recently to see the results of a national assessment of mathematics achievement. I was sure that the youngsters in private and parochial schools would do better because their parents are more educated, they come from wealthier homes, and seventy-five percent of private and parochial schools require an entrance exam, and all of them can kick out kids. The assessment found that at the end of high school these youngsters do just as poorly as public school youngsters. Those who conducted the study started asking themselves, "Why do youngsters who do more homework, take more math, are going to schools where they don't have all the violence and disturbances we have in many of our public schools, end up with the same results?" Terrible results by the way. I've looked and looked, and the only answer I've found is that when youngsters get to high school,

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they find out that they don't have to work to get into college. Since they don't have to work to graduate from high school, they stop working. They turn on those teachers who've pushed them very hard. No one else cares about learning.

If they don't want to go to Harvard or Yale or Princeton, they say, "I can get into ninety-five percent of the colleges in this country." Setting college and university standards determines curriculum standards in both high schools and elementary schools. It is a central issue and a very hot political one. I've taken this up with members of the administration. Indeed, I've had meetings with the secretary of education, and it's like trying to tamper with Social Security. Parents would fear that their children wouldn't make it. Now, we've got guaranteed college entry for every youngster in the United States regardless of any educational standard, and if you start fooling around with that, you'll be dealing with the fears of a very large number of people. How this is going to be turned around I don't know.

Abigail Thernstrom: It isn't simple, it seems to me. There are two points here. In part the fear is generated by the disparate racial and ethnic impact of setting any rigorous standards. Indeed, that impact is real. But there is another element: if you don't go on to college, if you go right into the work force, you don't need to have done well in high school. Employers generally don't ask for high school transcripts.

Al Shanker: That's the other part of it. In most other countries, there's some other form of credential. It might just be your grades, or it might be some other certificate. Students are always asking, "Does it count?" If they know that it doesn't count either for college or for getting a job, this also means, essentially, that what you spend time on doesn't make any difference because it doesn't count for anything. That, of course, lends some support to those who say, "Well, if this subject matter is going to be more interesting or is going to develop greater self-esteem in a given group, and if it doesn't make any difference, then why not do things that are being pushed for by certain groups, or which will develop greater self-esteem?" Everything is up for grabs.

Ronald Radosh: All this reminds me of an old joke in a *New Yorker* cartoon, in which a king is addressing a multitude of his country. He's standing in the balcony and says, "My first promise to you is that we're going to have an educated country, that is why I award each of you a college diploma." I don't know if any of you saw the incredible story on the *ABC Evening News* a few nights ago, a discussion of the high school textbooks in history. It amazed me for two reasons. In essence,

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they found that when some independent thinker checked through the textbooks, he found the most egregious, abominable errors on major things in American history, from the Korean War to the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. They had to keep correcting the texts. They changed the textbooks again and they had hundreds of new errors. Who writes, who edits these texts? There are no standards in the writing of these textbooks. What shocks me is that they interviewed the editorial director of one of the major publishers, he said that it didn't matter if all the important factual events are incorrectly presented. Now if this is the answer of the publisher, if the teacher has to keep pointing errors out to the students, what can one expect? The message students are getting is: why should we learn these things, if they don't matter? The teacher has just said, "What you're reading in the textbook isn't right." This produces tremendous mass cynicism.

The other question I wanted to address is the one raised by Edith, the teaching of fictional history at the expense of historical facts. I went to the town hall debate on *JFK* two nights ago, and the whole problem of mass culture came up. Thousands of people are learning about major historical events, whether it's John F. Kennedy's presidency or anything else, not from reading but from the mass media, from television docudramas and the movies. This raises a serious problem. Regardless of the merits of Oliver Stone's movie, the message that came from millions of people, including Nora Ephron, who's an educated person, a talented screenwriter, essentially is that proof and the facts of history don't matter, that what's important is our mythic understanding of the past; and that this is created not by scholars and professors but by artists and is as meaningful as, if not more meaningful than, anything any trained scholar is doing. One of the critics said, "If you believe Oliver Stone's movie, then you believe that JFK was assassinated by a conspiracy, whose leaders included Lyndon Johnson, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, the FBI, and the mob. Clearly, if there *was* such a conspiracy, something would have leaked out. In this country it couldn't be kept secret for so many years. Somebody would have said this is too implausible, beyond consideration and reality."

Nora Ephron ended up saying that she could admit that some impressionable young minds might get this feeling from watching Oliver Stone's movie, but so what? Twenty or thirty years from now they'd grow up and realize that that was the truth, and they may as well get the impression now from the film. All of this, of course, met with resounding applause from the audience. This is the mass culture. A film like *JFK* – and there will be many more, you already have *Mississippi Burning* – treats the past and the experience our country has gone

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through in superficial terms. People see these and believe that this is the reality, rather than what they were taught for one hour in a high school class or in a survey class in college. I think we have to address this kind of question. This is very serious because you have assaults not only from within the universities, but from mass culture, from the movie industry, from television that say, in effect, you don't need school. We can give you the truth in this new, easy to digest fashion, and it's as true as what you can learn in school. I find this extremely disturbing.

Wilson Moses: I too was disturbed when I read an article about the errors in textbooks that left you thinking that the Korean War came to an end when the atom bomb was used. And if you've got a textbook company that's owned by another company, that's owned by a record company which is owned by some French company, then it's possible they may think of textbooks in the same way they think of pork bellies. What I see as a problem here, to continue to push on in the populist analogy, is that we're sort of like the wheat farmers, and we can't get our ideas to market because the big textbook companies are like the railroads. We're stuck in a kind of Frank Norris universe, for we can't get our ideas out there because of various middlemen. College textbooks are a little different, but the high school textbook industry seems to be a quite different ball game.

C. Vann Woodward: I'm a part-time textbook writer myself, and I'm a little frightened by this. But I realize it's directed mainly to the high school level. We've had the publishers, the administration, and the students blamed for what's happened. I think we're neglecting the faculty. I think it's they who really determine the curriculum, and this is my concern in this crisis of the university. I don't think that the gross absurdities and nonsense that's interjected in the curriculum at universities comes from the students. I think it comes from the faculty, and I realize faculties are divided up and some have higher standards than others. But where there is a concerted distortion of this kind, it's faculty in origin, not students. I don't believe administrators intervene very much in the matter.

Roger Kimball: I think that's true. The administration in many institutions is implicated, perhaps not so much in devising the curriculum but certainly in imposing political correctness. It's really as much the administration's doing as the faculty's.

Digby Baltzell: I don't believe we have to organize against it, because the cutbacks will take care of it all. Yes, Edith, I too believe the buck stops at the university. The real tragedy is that we don't differentiate be-

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tween the university and the college. The essence of the college is a moral education, a manners education, for educated amateurs. One of my student's instructors said that he couldn't wait for his class to end so he could "get back to the important business of research." Now, they even want to make Dartmouth a research university. It's incredible, mainly because we no longer differentiate between the kids at places like Glassborough State, in southern New Jersey, with no background, and professors' children at Swarthmore.

William Phillips: I didn't get a moral education in college, but that isn't what I want to talk about. It seems to me that we're talking about two separate problems, interrelated but separate. One is the problem of general education in secondary and elementary schools. In other words, we're talking about how students don't know anything to begin with and know less when they get out. And the other problem is the problem of academic culture, of what's going on in the universities, that's now being lumped under the slogan "politically correct." You have the popular culture and the academic culture, but they do influence each other and share certain fundamental attitudes and values. Are the fifteen people sitting here going to change the whole country? What's happening in the popular culture in the country, I might suggest, is the general contempt for knowledge and education. Part of the popular culture in the country filters into the media and into television, even into newspapers. But what happens at the university level under the general tag of politically correct culture is something else.

Perhaps I've taken too literally the questions that were directed to us by Edith, but I would like to talk a little about what we could do. It's pretty clear that something's wrong in what's going on in the universities. I haven't conducted a poll, and I haven't visited universities to see what's going on, but I've read pieces by Dinesh D'Souza, by Roger Kimball, by Arthur Schlesinger; I've read other articles, and I teach at Boston University. I think I have some sense of what's going on. And it is very bad. As I've said, I'm generally pessimistic, but I find some support in Bertrand Russell's statement that if you're a pessimist you're bound to be right ninety percent of the time.

This is not a totalitarian society, and the university has not been totalitarianized. But we have a new culture in the university, a new ideology, and it's swept through the universities like a flood. It doesn't include everybody, but it includes the most vocal and the best organized, and the most aggressive section of the university. There are many people who don't care, there are many who don't want to get into trouble, who don't want to get involved in these battles, and I don't blame them because it's very unpleasant. I've faced some of this unpleasantness,

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and some of you here have faced it.

But I think we must recognize that what has been known as radicalism is what defines or determines the attitudes or the values of the new culture, the new ideology of the universities. It includes extreme feminist theories as well as the various liberation movements. Again, it's not a question of whether gays should be tolerated; what we're talking about is gay liberation, establishing itself aggressively at universities, and then there's black studies. Nobody's opposed to normal or even extensive studies of black literature or of women's literature. What one questions are the claims that are made, for example, by Afrocentrism, that all our culture comes from Egypt, which is a black country. I don't know how it's become black except by blood transfusions.

Now, it seems to me that people like us can engage in an intellectual debate with the culture as a whole that's being spread through the universities, and with specific false attitudes, like the stupid things that were written about Columbus, for example, the absurd things done in literary criticism. Most of you are not literary people, maybe you don't read the nonsense that's printed in the professional literary journals, but it's unbelievable. By now it's become a degraded, watered-down version of deconstruction, Freudianism, Marxism. There's a good deal of neo-Marxism that has very little to do with the original Marxist traditions. Marx himself believed in the past, in literary and philosophical traditions, in the tradition of ideas.

Fred Siegel: I want to disagree somewhat. In public forums held outside academia, some of the most militant of the multicultists like Catharine Stimpson and Gerald Graff run away from the previously held positions. By the time he and I finished a radio debate, Gerald Graff sounded indistinguishable from a traditional American pluralist. Henry Gates has similarly, and I think admirably, back-pedaled away from the "blood and soil" implications of multicultism's search for racial authenticity. Whenever I've pointed out that multiculturalism represents not pluralism and tolerance but its antithesis, separatism and intolerance, campus audiences, even with a large percentage of black students, have backed away from what they had previously thought of as appealing.

We were on to something important a little earlier, however, when we talked about the importance of high schools and academic administrators. While multiculturalism as an ideology is in full-fledged intellectual retreat, multicultism as an avenue for bureaucratic and administrative entrepreneurship is flourishing. A small item in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently noted that there had been a five hundred to eight hundred percent increase in the number of academic administrators during the 1980s. Even if the numbers are high, the increase in the number

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of people who look upon the campus as another therapeutic setting for career advancement through social work has been extraordinary. Multicultism is most deeply entrenched among the career academic administrators for whom any new fad is a potential ticket to advancement, particularly as in this case when the fad comes with Ford Foundation funding.

Administrators are largely immune to intellectual argument, but they aren't immune to the precipitous plunge of academic prestige set off by the recent college funding scandals such as at Stanford, in conjunction with the negative publicity garnered by the politically correct posturing on campus. From what I can tell by talking to politicians and their aides in Washington and elsewhere, the college campuses have suffered a considerable loss in standing. That loss has only been compounded by the pressures imposed by the continuing economic downturn, which has forced schools to reconsider their priorities. There is good reason to think that under these circumstances, the most luxuriant versions of multiculticultism will end up being trimmed.

William Phillips: I think Fred Siegel is wrong. Yet, if he's right, then what I think he's saying, as Abigail Thernstrom says, is that there seems to be no problem.

Abigail Thernstrom: No, I didn't quite say that.

William Phillips: It seems that all we have to do is to let it take its course. As to Gerald Graff , I just read a piece by him in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in which he defends multiculturalism. He defends it on highly dubious and questionable intellectual grounds. He says, as though he's confessing, that he's been teaching *Heart of Darkness* improperly all these years, and he beats his breast, saying he should have been pointing out that Conrad was representing merely the Western imperialist point of view, that he was not expressing African values. That, he says, is the best argument for multiculturalism. For the people here, I think, I needn't belabor the point that this kind of literary criticism may be all right for multiculturalists but not for people with critical minds.

Fred Siegel: I think you're right about what Graff does in print. But when he's confronted in public and is asked to defend these positions, he doesn't. He runs. You're right, when looking in the *Chronicle* nothing seems changed. I'm not sure the *Chronicle* recognizes that the Berlin Wall has fallen yet. But outside those limited spheres Graff backs off rather dramatically. I'm not saying that in the short and medium run there

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won't be damage, but just that in the long run this won't stand; it's too self-destructive.

Edith Kurzweil: I think you're pointing out, also, that people in the universities are defending their jobs as well. There, what you say may have consequences. The discussion sorts of floats away, is part of the media, a performance.

Roger Kimball: I want to extend what William said. My experience debating Stanley Fish and other such radicals is that, on a public radio station or some such forum, yes, they will present themselves as the voice of reason and enlightenment, and question what all the fuss is about. They say, for instance: "I'm just trying to open up the curriculum. We all believe in truth and justice and the American way, and so on. You crazy right-wingers are making this all up." But, if you go to the MLA, or to these radicals' classrooms, or their publications, they're quite different.

So we're talking about several generations of students who are being damaged. I too share your optimism about the long run, but that promises to be a very long run indeed. Yes, the edifice of multiculturalism will fall because it's false. But it can do a lot of damage in the meantime. I think we have to recognize that Gerry Graff and his fellow members of Teachers for a Democratic Culture are engaged in trying to win a public relations battle; in debates on National Public Radio they present their best face, because they realize that much is at stake, including money.

Ronald Radosh: But someone like Henry Louis Gates has, in print, reversed himself to a considerable degree. Now he sounds like a traditional pluralist.

Roger Kimball: Yes, Henry Louis Gates has taken almost every possible position on every possible subject.

Abigail Thernstrom: I want to defend myself. I didn't say there was no problem. I simply asked how big the problem is. I would like to ask a question of Ron Radosh. When people who are accustomed to separating reality from the movies go to a film like *JFK*, how important is that? I think it's easy to get alarmed, but is this justified? What kind of impact will it in fact have on political culture?

Ronald Radosh: Actually, if you're ever out in front of a theater during the day you will notice that quite a few high school classes are being

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taken to a movie. Teachers regularly take their students, sometimes to good movies like *Glory*, to films that depict or are based on an incident in reality. I don't know what they then do when they return to the classroom. That's another question.

Abigail Thernstrom: Yes, it would be very easy to get alarmed. But the fact is we're not about to elect some left-wing kook as President of the United States.

Ronald Radosh: There's always been a division between the culture and the political drift of the country. There's almost no relation. I want to address something that Roger and Fred said. Roger just mentioned Teachers for a Democratic Culture. The very name implies that those of us who've been concerned with these questions and have criticized "political correctness" are not for democracy or for a democratic culture. That was a clever name to have chosen. In her letter inviting us to this meeting, Edith addressed the relation of this whole debate to political issues. A few weeks ago, as Roger mentioned in his earlier remarks, Paul Lauter, at a conference in California, discussed the kinds of arguments Arthur Schlesinger has made in his book. And he made some general points about these educational, political and cultural issues. Lauter was extremely frightening and very revealing. He had clipped out an ad that many of you have seen in *The New York Times Book Review* for some obscure right-wing book that none of us have ever heard of. And he implied that the ad and this book had something to do with us and the things we are saying. Of course, the audience laughed, and he went on to say that this is pure 1950s, that this book belongs in the garbage pail; and he ripped it up and threw it in the garbage pail. He then held up the recent issue of *American Educator*, the AFT magazine, which reprinted a lengthy excerpt from Arthur's book on multiculturalism. And Lauter then went on to equate this erudite and intelligent book to the garbage of that ad and as belonging in the garbage pail too.

Lauter is an intelligent man, a distinguished professor who has written and published widely. His audience was eating this up. He went on to say there is no such thing as political correctness, that it's been devised by the right wing to protest the fact that he and his friends, ostensibly the left wing, have opened up the universities to blacks, to women, to gays. I tried to counter it by saying that, in fact, all historians make use of much of the recent feminist history, women's history; that tremendous contributions have been made in the last twenty years in the reinterpretation of slavery. But the left wing is trying to suggest that it alone is concerned with the fate of blacks and women and civil rights.

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Lauter is a clever debater; he did not back down. He defended his position right down the line, and he won a good section of that audience. A good percentage of that audience was black, made up of two-year college and high school teachers from California, who are very involved in the union. Quite a few of them condemned me from the floor as an advocate of genocide, of racism, of everything you can imagine, because I opposed Afrocentrism. One of them even said that everything Leonard Jeffries said was true.

I argued that Leonard Jeffries is propounding racist theories and that we can't tolerate black racism any more than white racism, that both are illogical and wrong. And one audience member answered that there can be no such thing as black racism because by definition blacks cannot be racist. I know we're all familiar with this, but it is extremely upsetting. I didn't know what to answer. The Teachers for a Democratic Culture and Lauter seem to be pandering to this audience, saying "We are your representatives." The National Association of Scholars, which I joined, is condemned as right-wing, even though its members have a broad range of opinion. But because the organization champions standards, attacks political correctness and the extremism of multiculturalism, it is being condemned as right-wing. We have to think of some way of countering this.

Roger Kimball: It's really a rhetorical battle.

Jean Elshtain: I agree with Fred that the intellectual argument on multiculturalism eventually can be won, if you point out not just in theory but in practice that it leads to infighting, separatism and resegregation. In listening to female students, I realized that feminism now doesn't permit the mind to roam at will but confines it within certain parameters. But I want to tie together what goes on from elementary school all the way to college. I am referring to Al Shanker's comment about the quest for self-esteem. An article in *The Atlantic Monthly* last November pointed out the extraordinary dearth of actual knowledge students bring into college, and the fact that that dearth, rather than being compensated for, is played into by the creation of therapeutic enclaves. Students come to us after sitting around for twelve years expressing attitudes, talking about how they feel, without having learned how to construct a rational argument. Now, college teachers are put in the position of being in danger of wounding students' feelings. The therapeutic mindset is creeping in; we are compelled to take account of sensitivity and comfort levels – all the way from elementary school onward. It reminds me of the time I had a specific complaint against my son's elementary school teacher, and she responded by telling me that I had a

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problem with my comfort level. I said I was comfortable but happened to disagree with what was going on.

Arthur Schlesinger: I find I think about this issue on two levels, on the level of higher education, which we've mostly talked about today, and on the level of primary and secondary education. I think Vann Woodward made a valuable point about the complicity of the faculty in allowing this situation to develop. It's odd to me why at so many colleges the English department is the focus of infection. Historians are more skeptical, at least judging by my correspondence. English departments seem to be the carriers of the malady. I endorse Digby Baltzell's point about the administrators as an over-swollen part of the university. They always have to find something to do to justify their existence. In many cases they are transients without strong attachments to the particular institution, and they do have the therapeutic frame of mind. Sometimes they anticipate situations, create situations, almost create their own constituency.

I also rather agree with Fred Siegel, that so much of the situation around higher education is due to the tendency on the part of professors who know better to cultivate their own gardens rather than get involved in some local brawl. At some point, I think, most members of faculty know that political correctness is a pop vogue. I believe it will be short-lived. I think it will come to an end when other faculty members bestir themselves and try to rescue the curriculum from the distortions that have been imposed upon it by sentimentalists and romantics.

What worries me much more is the situation in secondary schools. I am concerned about the extent to which the curriculum in a number of major cities is influenced by, or based on, the Portland pamphlets – another manifestation of Afrocentric extravagance. Al Shanker can tell us more about this. It is an alarming situation. It also presents a diversion from dealing with the real problems of schools – getting safer schools, better teaching materials, better teachers, more investment in education. Beyond lie the larger problems of society – achieving stable families with children capable of self-discipline, and creating the jobs needed to produce stable families. I'm more worried about primary and secondary schools than I am about universities.

Wilson Moses: I think you are absolutely right. I see, however, a problem that occurs among most intellectuals and policy makers in this country, a failure to understand that the Afrocentric movement is a movement of the right. The leadership of the Modern Language Association is intellectually on the left. What we see in the Afrocentric movement and in Leonard Jeffries is a very good example of the hate

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that hate produced. I cannot support it, but I view it, nonetheless, as a cry of pain. The Afrocentrists are paranoid, if understandably so; they are extreme nationalists, fascistic ethno-chauvinists. Afrocentrists view the post-modern doctrines of the academy as Euro-American decadence. The multiculturalists view the Afrocentrists, with their advocacy of traditional gender roles and family values, as homophobic and sexist. [Note: Since these remarks were delivered, Harvard University Black Studies Director Henry Louis Gates, in *The New York Times* of June 3, 1992, has described Afrocentrism as "classic escapism and romanticism."]

Fred Siegel: In what's going on in the streets, literally in the streets of Brooklyn where I live, the distinction fades. I think you're right intellectually. But when I look at people marching down Church Avenue, or I watch what happened in Crown Heights, or I look at community meetings being disrupted, it is the Afrocentrist groups and other groups, for the moment at least, who are making common cause. I agree with you that much of the ideology can be described as Afro-fascist. But on the day-to-day level, and on the level of public perception, the two are tightly connected. At the upper levels of the university you're right, they're separate. But in fights over the school curriculum in Brooklyn, for instance, the New Alliance party and the black nationalist groups are in complete accord.

Wilson Moses: New Alliance is obviously a freaky group. They continually state their commitment to gay causes, and yet they give their support to Louis Farrakhan, a notorious gay basher. The leaders are opportunists, who jump on every available band wagon. This is really a bizarre kind of coalition.

Fred Siegel: With a lot of money.

Wilson Moses: Absolutely. They are really bizarre. I think when you talk about New Alliance and about Lenora Fulani and her group, it simply shows you how far removed all that is from what's going on in the university. In the university, on the other hand, we do have people who are involved in public policy issues and who are trying to affect public policy in ways that are very much in conflict with what happens in the streets.

Fred Siegel: And in the local school curriculum, in the fights over what can be dealt with in the schools. These two groups have joined together.

Abigail Thernstrom: I just want to return to the question of stan-

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dards. I think standards at the elementary and secondary school levels are part of the problem: they are extremely hard to institute. We have come to label as discriminatory traditional methods of streaming and sorting students, of recognizing that some students are performing academically better than others. So there's a whole leveling thrust that has very dire implications. Not only for the way we group students, the way we organize the classroom, the way we recognize excellence, but also for the curriculum. That is, once you start arguing that blacks think differently, that they can't be tested by the standardized tests we now use, you are revising the curriculum in the ways we now know.

Jean Elshtain: And there self-esteem kicks in again.

Abigail Thernstrom: Well, that's part of the issue. Affirmative action policies are affecting not only the way we organize education but also the way we teach.

Al Shanker: They are affirmative action policies based on the theories that black kids can't make it in terms of standards. An interesting piece of evidence recently was pointed out by Barbara Lerner: in the late sixties and early seventies a reform swept states across the country, to develop minimum competency exams for high school graduation. It was believed that by establishing these exams, black students would drop out, that they would stay in school only if they knew that they were guaranteed a diploma: if they had to pass an examination they would drop out due to their fear of not being able to pass; and that those who remained would not be able to pass and get their certificate. Yet courts in a number of states permitted testing. In the first two, three years, indeed, there were very huge rates of failure by black students. But after four, five or six years, the rate of failure was around three percent among whites and around six percent among blacks.

The main thing that's happened, reflected in this example, is the huge increase in achievement on the part of black youngsters, about eighty percent of whom used to be in the bottom categories, the illiterate, the semi-illiterate. They're not there anymore. They just went right up because there was a standard, and something was attached to it that was important to them, namely high school graduation. Teachers thought it was important, parents thought it was important, students knew it was important and they reached it. There has been a failure to take note of this experience. Yes, there might very well be a disparate amount of impact if we raised the standards. But setting standards over a period of time will result in huge numbers of minority students meeting standards. One other thing. I'm bothered by conceding the word

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"multiculturalism" to the other side. I think we're the multiculturalists. The West is multicultural. The United States has been founded on it. What the others are talking about really isn't multiculturalism, it's a form of separatism, of different types of ethnocentricities. The fact is there've been many borrowers within the West from cultures outside the West and from cultures within. The very nature of this country is multicultural.

Roger Kimball: That's a very important point. That whole rhetorical battle is gruesome. I think the term "multiculturalism" has to be conceded, unfortunately, because it's too contaminated. But it's not really a battle between reactionaries and liberals, they being the liberals, we being the reactionaries. It's between a certain kind of radicalism which is indeed not multiculturalist in the slightest, and good, old-style liberalism, which believes in disinterested scholarship and the pursuit of truth. Why should we concede terms like "virtue" and "diversity" to the other side?

Jean Elshtain: One of the best statements about America and diversity is found in Randolph Bourne's 1916 essay on the trans-national state, in which he talks about his vision of a society that is trans-national, that is weaving back and forth many different strands. Yet this metaphor is not a sort of quilt where you have solid colors meeting on the margins and not really having anything to do with one another: rather it is a genuine sort of transnationality where the possibilities for engagement are always present and you're learning who you are through the conspicuous contrasts that others who are different have to offer. I think that's very different from multiculturalism as a sort of code word for separatism and a militant group-identity.

Edith Kurzweil: There's something which keeps striking me whenever I receive reports on multiculturalism and look at textbooks. It seems that among Poles, Italians, Germans, Irish, all of the differences among them are totally missing: they're lumped as "white." I've brought a sampling of flyers, of stuff that routinely comes across my desk. It's nothing very extraordinary, except for the fact that every publisher, obviously for commercial reasons, has gone in for the "multiculturalist" line. And whatever opposing viewpoints are incorporated are meaningless because they are within that frame.

But I wanted to go back to some other points. What you've all been saying is that the culture is being reflected in all our schools – in our universities, our elementary schools and our high schools; that it's very hard to keep things apart. But, in addition, schools are dealing with federal and legal guidelines that are being implemented in the university.

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When I looked recently at the Rutgers University affirmative action progress report, I realized that in some places percentages are given and not in others. Indirectly, you also find out that between 1978 and 1990 the number of faculty decreased by approximately 1,100, while the non-instructional staff increased by about 1,200. Now this is for the Rutgers system, but I'm sure we're not unique. A lot of staff positions, I think, have to do with mandated reporting, with reporting on faculty, on achievements, with the therapeutic mission you've been talking about, with feeling better. I had no idea, for instance, that we did have such a large black support staff on our campus, until Skip Gates came for a talk. And I didn't realize that they would be so interested in what he had to say. But this might point to the fact that media events make for reputations, and that they help perpetuate the so-called multiculturalism. Thus it's difficult to filter things out, because there's a constant movement in and out. Many people who are in fact going along with this line do so because they feel pushed. Maybe if more of us were to talk up, we might be getting some of them back on our side.

Ronald Radosh: I agree with Mr. Shanker on ceding the term "multiculturalism." It is a very confused term. But the problem is not one of our curriculum not being multi-ethnic. The problem is that addressing traditional values immediately brands one as being a fascist. The people who have the upper hand in the universities are not the ones supporting traditional values, not among blacks, Jews, or gentiles. The fact is that in today's American university there is no sense of commitment to traditionalism.

Edith Kurzweil: Don't you think that some of this has to do with the fact that when you talk against this phenomenon you're called conservative, and this makes you tend to pull back? I felt I had to defend Arthur Schlesinger against the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, because I had asked them for money to have today's meeting.

Wilson Moses: Really?

Edith Kurzweil: Yes. This was a few months ago, shortly after he came out against the Sobol Report. I got angry when I was told by the foundation representative that at least I ought to invite Sobol. I said that I didn't want to replicate the discussions that have been taking place, and that I thought it was outrageous to throw away a man's lifetime record, to call him a conservative because he wanted kids to learn something. Of course you, Mr. Schlesinger, were the example, but I think all of us have been in this position. A number of us, at least in my network, are sociologists. And we all went into sociology in order to protest

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something; the discipline itself exists as a form of protest. And some of us keep continuing to protest whenever we believe something to be wrong.

Jean Elshtain: If we have arrived at a situation when talking about the values that may adhere in tradition is to get oneself labeled as fascist, we may as well pack our bags and go home. I think some people in the Democratic Party are trying to get back to those kinds of debates and discussions. One of the ways in which multiculturalism on the campus has been coded, if you will, goes something like this: to recognize cultural difference commits one to moral relativism. Those two things have tended to go together, and, in turn, invite an attitude of non-judgmentalism. We can't make a judgment about someone else's life or way of thinking. We can't criticize them because it's their culture. This bland acceptance of whatever comes down the pike also has its analog, perhaps even its origins, in elementary school, where the notion that we can't teach values, only value clarification, because otherwise we would make someone feel bad, became if not pervasive at least prevalent. My own kids were coming home with heavy doses of that sort of stuff, refusing to make judgments because they'd link into some kind of value that would offend someone. But in a democracy – Edith in her initial questions tied some of this to our view of a democracy – we're talking about politics that encodes a very specific set of moral values, what it means to have political standing, to engage in democratic debate, in contrast to living in a world in which rules are laid down, where individuals have no choices. So if we no longer can endorse the notion of democratic value because we might judge people too harshly, then we're in a tough situation.

Wilson Moses: It's not only the multiculturalization. I teach two hundred and fifty students at Boston University, in both English and history. I go from my lecture on Teddy Roosevelt to my lecture on James Joyce. There's one thing that's common about the two groups. I have one black male among two hundred and fifty students. So much for affirmative action. Out of those two hundred and fifty students, I had one who protested the other day because I postponed a quiz. And he said, "I wasted my time studying and it's all your fault." Now that's the kind of problem I see. I'm sure this guy's got SATs over six hundred, and he's going to go along and get admitted to some good law school or will end up as a physician. The problem is that these students are not interested in what you're talking about, which is a tradition, let's call it liberalism, a tradition of debate, of discourse, of dialectic, of a Talmudic dialectic. It's very difficult to get our students engaged.

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C. Vann Woodward: Does the fact that you have only one black student mean that the other black students are taking black history or that they're not taking any history?

Wilson Moses: I taught a black history course last semester, and I had fifty students. There were six blacks in the classroom, and one of them was me.

C. Vann Woodward: And all the rest were white?

Wilson Moses: All the rest were white.

Jean Elshtain: What are they taking?

Wilson Moses: The number of black students on campuses is going down, according to the *Chronicle*. There just aren't as many students out there. That gets back to Mr. Schlesinger's point that we've got problems here that have to do with the ability of people to send their kids to college. At Boston University we have an increasing number of foreign students because they can pay and the American kids can't.

Abigail Thernstrom: I don't think it's the absence of financial support that explains the drop in black college attendance. Black *women* are going to college in increasing numbers. Black males are the problem.

Sondra Farganis: Allow me to see if I can pull together for myself the two positions that William presented because I've been troubled, as you have, over whether America is all of a piece. And in some sense the discussion today has troubled me even more. I had occasion to go back and read a piece by Brigitte and Peter Berger that first appeared in *The New Republic* in 1971 and was published in their book *Facing up to Modernity*, on the blueing of America, and I was struck by its relevance. The piece argues that the radicalism of the sixties will be something that we won't really have to worry about because there are a lot of working-class students who want to come into the university and want nothing to do with what they consider political nonsense. My experience in working with adult students, which is the largest growing population of students in the country, is that the blueing of America will resolve political correctness because the majority of the people coming into universities now are really not interested either in literary culture or in the epistemological arguments that are at the root of political correctness. When I was at Vassar, the debates over PC affected us every day. They were a threat to

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those who saw reasoned discourse as the essential quality of the university. At the New School, those debates don't matter at all. The older students I deal with want exactly what students have always wanted: the credentials that get jobs in order to become consumers of American goods and services, instruction in the legacy of their own heritage. So in a perverse way, the demise of high culture may solve the political problem.

Roger Kimball: It would seem to me a tragedy to wait for this solution.

Sondra Farganis: I'm not presenting it as a solution. I think it's the way history may play itself out. I think tight economic situations could solve political correctness. Because if cuts are going to be made they will be made in the newest areas of the curriculum, the most interdisciplinary, the most multi-disciplinary and the most costly.

Roger Kimball: I don't know. It seems to me there's such vested interest in women's studies programs and in black studies programs; there would be a real political fight to save them.

Abigail Thernstrom: Last year at Harvard, before Skip Gates came, almost no one concentrated in African studies, and there was only one tenured professor, who was white. That would have been a very good time to merge that department into the regular disciplines, but nobody had the courage to do it. It wasn't even raised as an issue.

Wilson Moses: When I was in African-American studies at Brown, we decided not to encourage more than three or four majors per year. In effect the program discouraged African-American studies majors, as such. We had a policy that Afro-American studies must, in effect, be offered as part of a double major. That is, students could not concentrate in Afro-American studies unless they had the equivalent of a major in some other discipline, political science, or chemistry, or foreign languages, for example. The policy was enacted by black Americans, especially the program director who preceded me, and I saw no reason to change this policy, when I became director of the program. Now the reason we did this was that some of us were parents, and we tended to believe we should run the black studies program from a parents' point of view and function *in loco parentis*, even though, as you can imagine, this kept the students in a constant state of indignation. A couple of years ago all four of the people who graduated with the joint major in Afro-American studies were white. Sometimes the issues around black studies become confused

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because people listen to the reports of people like D'Souza, which I place in the category of Ripley's Believe-It-Or-Not. Black studies faculty are often the parents of college-bound children. We try to direct undergraduates in directions where we would like to see our own children go. Most black faculty do not encourage our children or the children of others to become involved in faddish movements such as deconstruction, romantic racialism, or the radical reconstruction of gender. Furthermore, most black studies faculty feel that the real struggle is not for the administrative autonomy of black studies. For my part, I agree with such senior black scholars as John Hope Franklin and Adelaide Cromwell, who have insisted that African-American content and black faculty should be integrated into the standing departments of the university. It's only the lunatic fringe who view departmental autonomy for black studies as a panacea for all our problems.

Abigail Thernstrom: I have a connected question both for Al Shanker and for Arthur Schlesinger that goes back to the Portland baseline essays, the Bible for the Afrocentric movement. How serious is this scholarly trash taken, say, in a school in Battle Creek, Michigan? Does this stuff really matter? Or are you talking about the major urban school systems with high concentrations of black kids?

Arthur Schlesinger: I'm sure Al knows much more than I do. When I served on the New York board to revise the social studies curriculum and I asked to what extent guidelines from above determine what happens in the classroom, the answer I got from teachers was that there was a kind of framework, but it did not circumscribe teachers in any notable way. It was a matter of interpretation. I got the impression that whereas it would serve as a vindication for people who wanted to teach in one way or another, it would not necessarily change their teaching methods. It was more a question of the allocation of time, the reduction of time – European history against third world history. I think Al Shanker has a better idea of this than I do.

Al Shanker: I think it is true that some teachers have a very strong commitment to what they do, and it is very difficult to have them change it. Basically, they can do what they want. We should not underestimate the ability of any fad to sweep the schools, especially where large numbers of people do not have a very firm background in their own fields. That's true of very large numbers of people. They are always looking for textbooks. Textbooks are of terrible quality because they result from pressures in different states: in order to sell them, publishers have to have eight to ten or eleven states adopt them. That means you'll

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get something that's not written by an historian, and it goes through eight or nine revisions. It's done by a committee that decides what person has to be represented, what pictures to put in. You end up getting something huge, boring, and unreadable. And there's a tremendous push for fads and trendiness: they take over the professional organizations and the textbook folks. School boards, principals, superintendents are always looking for something to turn into the focus of a newsletter or a conference – to give it a bit of legitimacy. You don't really debate these things. They're taken as fact, as great discoveries, and always are presented as enlarging your scope and your ability to do things.

These texts are used in a very large number of classrooms throughout the country. They are discussed at National School Board Association meetings, at the meetings of the American Association of School Administrators, at principals' meetings, at conferences all over the country. You cannot now have a conference without such presentations – not as something controversial but as the latest advance. That's a considerable amount of pressure. I've been getting letters from parents who are getting involved. And teachers don't have the time to start looking into what's accurate or inaccurate. The more immediately usable the form, the better for them. A lot of the commercial outfits get their message out, and they put it in the form of a lesson plan. In addition, many libraries are publishing background materials and schools are ordering them. I don't know to what extent teachers use them, but some of the referenced materials are very racist and anti-Semitic. And students are urged to read them. I've gotten letters from parents who have complained. The schools feel they must buy these books, or they would be accused of being racist or trying to censor.

Jean Elshtain: And then the parents are complaining that that's censorship.

Celeste Colgan: There's probably no way we can know of all the bogus scholarship, and we may know its impact only by anecdote. For instance, at the National Endowment for the Humanities we often have a scholar come in to give a brown-bag lunch lecture. We succeeded in getting Frank Snowden, an eminent classicist, who has spent his life understanding the African imprint upon classical architecture and culture, and so on. It seemed to be a very timely thing for us to talk about. His lecture was widely attended. In addition to the program officers at the Endowment, many of the support staff were there. Most of its members are products of the school system of Washington, DC or of the immediate outlying districts. Frank Snowden succeeded in overturning one after another of Martin Bernal's arguments and with pictures

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demonstrated the falseness of Bernal's assertions. There was much confusion after his talk, which caught us by surprise. There were shouts such as "How dare you take away our heroes?" and "How can you do this?" It was very, very clear that many of the staff had been misinformed about the African impact on classical architecture, classical literature, the classical world, and they did not appreciate Snowden's lecture. That's just a small anecdote, but it does indicate that these things, particularly in urban centers, are pervasive, and that this type of scholarship does find its way to the elementary and secondary schools.

Edith Kurzweil: What I find interesting is the fact that history as such, the history we grew up on, is being delegitimized and considered unimportant. There are fewer prerequisites in history, fewer needs to take courses in history for graduation. And yet, specific histories are being glorified. That's a kind of interesting contradiction, isn't it?

Jean Elshtain: This parallels some developments in women's studies. I think initially the impulse, and it's a very good one, is to try to do justice to those who have been unfairly excluded. For instance, my first high school text mentioned in a paragraph, maybe, women's suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were mentioned, but not in connnection with women's liberation and abolitionism. Getting all those stories in seems to be part of constructing the history of a common culture, a series of engagements. That seems very different to me from the move toward a kind of compensatory history, where women are cast as universal victims. This history of women's culture stands then, not only apart from, but in a necessarily antagonistic relationship to those who are deluded enough to think that there could be a common culture – which includes the unfortunate suffragettes who held that view. At that point you get also the invention of mythical pasts, such as the golden age of matriarchy, all sorts of nonsense that has not enjoyed a very good reputation in women's studies but is part of some feminist theorizing. Sometimes it gets tied to cynicism about the present political situation, other times it feeds into loony utopian hopes.

Abigail Thernstrom: On this question of the distortions of history in elementary and secondary schools, James Q. Wilson has said that he doesn't "really worry that national goals will make it easier for some local high school to teach black nationalism or Iroquois political theory." He sees our national goal as getting "Mary and Johnny . . . to read *anything* – seriously, frequently, and with comprehension."

Al Shanker: I think that that point of view is part of what's wrong

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with elementary and secondary education. In order to reform schools in the United States, we're constantly looking to some simple solution, like adding a month to the school year. But look at the great difference in outcomes in European countries. For example, only five to six percent of American students still in school at age eighteen (after twenty-five percent have dropped out) are able to achieve at what is considered the highest writing level, being the ability to write a good letter or essay. Only five to six percent can read and comprehend material like *The New York Times* or handle real twelfth-grade math problems. In contrast, in Germany, thirty percent of graduating students meet much higher standards than the ones I've just described. They're not throwing away the kids at the bottom either: their bottom kids do a lot better than ours, so it's not a matter of their educating only an elite, whereas we're concerned with educating everybody. When you get such a difference, it seems to me that the intelligent thing to do would be to look at what they're doing that's different from what we're doing. For one thing, they all agree on curriculum content. They do not have every teacher, or every school, or every district doing something different; they make collective decisions. They change these from time to time, but they deal with what's worthwhile, with issues of values – as a province, or as a country, even when the common curriculum isn't always one hundred percent of the curriculum. The failure here to face this issue or even to discuss it is problematic.

I recently looked at a paper that was drawn up by a distinguished group of English teachers from across the country. They were to write a description of what standards should be met by outstanding teachers. Their document spoke to children's interests, took their differences into account. But this document made no reference to the desire or the ability to read anything worthwhile, or to any sort of common content. It was all process and capturing children's interest. I also think that the dismissal of E. D. Hirsch's book, *Cultural Literacy*, as a right-wing document denied the possiblity that some things may be worthwhile reading in common. In a society, every writer assumes that you've got a certain amount of background knowledge and a certain amount of common understanding. If you don't have that, then what you read doesn't make much sense to you; it would make about as much sense as reading a British newspaper would to me. I could read the words, but I wouldn't understand much if I didn't know British politics or sports or all sorts of other things. In other words, the idea that we need to spend some time developing a common background was thrown out as some sort of right-wing conspiracy to get all youngsters to learn about dead white males and European culture. I think that was sort of the beginning of

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this multiculturalism fight, even before it was mentioned in relation to the curriculum. I think it's one of the major differences between American education and the education of other industrial, democratic countries, and it is one of the reasons why we don't make it competitively.

Edith Kurzweil: All this, it seems to me, gets us back to asking how we could change the culture. Wilson Moses, you brought up the parents.

Wilson Moses: It is significant that many of the people who talk about multiculturalism send their kids to places like Exeter and Andover, and then on to integrated colleges, not to historically black ones. This contradiction is not peculiar to black Americans. Hispanic-, Jewish-, Chinese-Americans, and other groups all try to encourage integration while preserving ethnic integrity.

Abigail Thernstrom: Why isn't there a public outcry? Why don't parents say, "Wait a minute. What are they teaching my kids at school? These are not my values."

Al Shanker: Parents are not well-organized, but radical versions of multiculturalism are really not popular with them. In New York there actually was a poll conducted about the issues raised by the Sobol Report. It found that black parents, by a big majority, believe that teaching America's common heritage and values is very important. About eighty-eight percent of black parents thought so, while about seventy percent of white parents did – a smaller percentage. Across ethnic and racial groups, the overwhelming majority of parents said both the common heritage and the contributions of America's diverse population should be taught. There was very, very little support for the kind of separatism advocated in the Sobol Report.

Arthur Schlesinger: I'll tell you where there is a problem: it is in the self-appointed media spokesmen, such as Al Sharpton. He's good copy, good television. The media creates such spokesmen.

Al Shanker: National polls show that the overwhelming majority favors a national curriculum. Maybe we ought to worry that the public wants to go too far in terms of homogeneity.

Jean Elshtain: I think parents feel beleaguered. For one thing, there are limits on people's time. People are hard-pressed; both mothers and fathers work. You used to rely on the women taking care of the PTA and so forth. The way parents raise issues also comes under question. And often

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parents' comments are being treated as symptoms, therapeutically. I think pushing this kind of mindlessness is a real problem.

Abigail Thernstrom: Most parents believe in God and country, and when their kids come home from school and say, "Did you know that Christopher Columbus was a racist homophobe?" why don't they get upset?

Al Shanker: If the parent complains, the parent is told that the youngsters are taught this way to raise their self-esteem, because if they have low self-esteem they can't learn. And they have low self-esteem because the people who have been in power up to now have imposed a curriculum upon us. And when these kids see what their heritage is, and how they have been brainwashed, they will achieve well. Therefore, if you want your youngsters to achieve well, you'll support this. Parents will also be told that this self-esteem rationale is legitimate and scientific. And there's no one there to say, "Look, lots of groups throughout history have had high self-esteem and have not been literate or productive or ethical."

The fact is there has been a lot left out and distorted in our curriculum and textbooks about the contributions of minorities. This is and always has been a multicultural country. I support multicultural education. But what I see happening and don't support are "-centric " educations and the self-esteem argument used to support them.

Wilson Moses: Well, we should convince people that folks who have inferiority complexes are often over-achievers. Then we can convince the parents – I am being sarcastic – to instill inferiority complexes in their children.

Fred Siegel: Part of the reason that there isn't as much protest as might be expected is that people sort themselves out. Families place their children in private or parochial schools, or they move to more congenial districts. The net effect is that the public schools are being abandoned by a significant part of the middle class. Families flee to suburban public schools that are functionally private, that is, most of the local taxes are directly devoted to the schools. Faced with intractable institutions that seem incapable of performing their basic missions, a significant portion of the population has seceded from public social institutions. It is part of what might be described as a double secession in which, for different reasons, both part of the middle class and part of the black underclass secede from common institutions and a common culture.

On a second point, it is important to note that the enabling myth

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behind multiculturalism is the notion that until the day before yesterday the college curriculum was lily white, and so on. What is ignored in all this is that multiculturalism represents an attack on the curricula that were established in response to the civil rights movement. New York's infamous Sobol Report, for instance, was aimed at replacing a curriculum put in place in 1987 by a group of respected liberal and leftist scholars. Similarly, some of the prominent multiculturalists argue that before their assault of reason, an absolutist conception of knowledge reigned supreme on campuses. This is literally incredible, since for them it is as if John Dewey had never lived. In fact, as Richard Rorty has noted, multiculturalism is epistemologically very much a continuation of what James and Dewey had begun.

What lies at the political core of multiculturalism where it intersects political correctness is an epistemological double game in which ordinary knowledge claims are subjected to a withering Nietzschean scrutiny, while brandishing an absolutist certainty about the epistemological and political claims of those designated as oppressed. When this discrepancy is noted, it usually is greeted with the intellectual equivalent of catcalls describing the speaker as racist, sexist, and so on. Once the personal became reductively political, rational debate was short-circuited. The temptation to dismiss a vexing argument in the terms of the person making it became overwhelming for many. Intellectually, such reductionism just isn't interesting, but socially it has coercive possibilities, since it leaves individuals with only three options; to leave, to fight, or to ignore each other. It leaves cooperation out of the question.

Al Shanker: We should remember that there were certain predecessors to Afrocentricity. In the sixties it was community control. The idea was that the parents should control the school – they were interested in their children, and the power structure was not. Shortly after that came the idea that the reason black kids weren't doing well was because they were speaking a different language that teachers didn't understand. So teachers by court order were sent to take courses in black English.

Fred Siegel: In essence what you are saying is that both political correctness and multiculturalism are the bastard offspring of the late 1960s marriage between the ethical tribalism of the black power movement and the conceptual charity of guilt-ridden liberals unable to condemn even the most self-destructive minority behavior. The two seminal events in producing this disastrous coupling were the wrenching fight over black nationalism occasioned by New York's Ocean-Hill Brownsville affair and the bitter debate set off by the Moynihan Report on the debilitating decline of the black family. In the Ocean-Hill Brownsville affair, trans-racial

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criteria for teaching were attacked as expressions of bourgeois cultural imperialism. The result of the Moynihan Report debate was that open discussion of the debilitating decline of the black family was shut down for two decades. The crusade for political correctness was in significant measure an attempt to maintain silence on the subject of ghetto culture at a time when the accuracy of the Moynihan Report could no longer be doubted.

Similarly, much of what has gone by the name of multiculturalism is an elaboration and intensification of the themes that first emerged in the wake of the Moynihan Report and Ocean-Hill Brownsville. Andrew Billingsley's widely read book-length rejoinder to Moynihan argued that the black family was ailing only by Eurocentric standards. At the same time, Joyce Ladner's influential late sixties attack on integrationist liberalism, *The Death of White Sociology*, denounced the Enlightenment and white rationality as the sources of black oppression. For both the mystics of the counterculture and those ideologically insistent on denying the ugly impact of underclass culture, reason and its rules on the one hand and the conventional family on the other became the enemy. Rule-based reason meant that there were standards of propriety by which actions and individuals could be measured. Propriety and its cousin property meant that there were bounadries to be maintained, something denied in the sixties by those – whether counterculturalists or black powerites – who insisted, in anticipation of the blood-and-soil leftist multiculturalism of the nineties, that truth could be measured only against myth. Yet as we should have learned from both fascist and communist myth-making, myth-making is rarely self-correcting.

What was for a while alarming about the multiculturalism of the early 1990s was that its influence had spread so far as to encompass an increasingly politically correct *New York Times*. In an extraordinary editorial, the *Times* defended the multicultural emphasis on racial differences on the grounds that culture is simply an extension of biology. David Duke would have no doubt agreed. Yet the impact of economic reality is again likely to restrain some of these excesses. Most Americans understand that on his recent trip to Japan, President Bush was in effect asking for affirmative action on behalf of American imports. The public, increasingly aware of international competition, is beginning to see what the real costs are of subsidizing failure at home by lowering standards that should be leveled up instead of down.

Wilson Moses: One comment about the Moynihan report. Remember that Muhammad Speaks supported it. The opposition came from the left, it did not come from grass-roots black people. It did not come from

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Martin Luther King.

Fred Siegel: Not at first. But in 1991 *The Nation* could run an entire issue showing that the Moynihan report was still wrong. The earth is flat in any case.

James Farganis: I just want to pick up on a comment Fred Siegel made on the sixties and go back to something William was talking about earlier on. There was something about the left, and you certainly find it in critical theory and the Frankfurt school, that never embraced popular culture. There was a critical dimension with respect to pop culture. We used to talk of mass culture and mass society. That terminology has dropped out of our purview now. The reason it's dropped out, I think, and Allan Bloom recognized this, is that the foundations of the current movement are Nietzschean and not Marxist. In that sense there's emerged a kind of nihilistic attitude toward all history, towards all ideas, and a reversion to the sense of the creative self as the only source of meaning. But you can't run a university or a society that way. It seems to me it's the shift from Marx to Nietzsche that has brought about much of what we see in the deconstructionist movement and, ultimately, the personalization of everything: you can't have standards if the source of truth is the self.

Fred Siegel: That's true. I think you're right. I would just add that there has been a great deal of continuity on this score. From the political correctness of the 1930s, which felt it could suppress free speech on the grounds of Marxianized scientific certainty, on to the sixties Marcuseans battling what they saw as repression of tolerance, down to the contemporary epistemologically nihilist but politically absolutist PCers, there has been a running argument against free speech. The underlying epistemology has shifted in the movement from Marx to Nietzsche, but the underlying political sentiment regarding free speech has been strikingly consistent.

William Phillips: I think you have a merger of Marx and Nietzsche, as the debunking of history by Marx with the nihilism of Nietzsche get combined, as they do in Foucault. Foucault has been a large influence, even though most people can't understand him.

Edith Kurzweil: I think we all seem to agree on the problems, but we have not yet addressed how to solve them. So why don't we think hard and try and come up with some ideas of what to do, after lunch? I would want us to think of how to approach the problems we've been

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addressing, and to think of how we might convince the larger culture to institute changes.

* * *

William Phillips: We want to spend the second installment of our meeting on the question of what can be done. We've talked a lot about the situation as it is, trying to define it, analyze it, distinguish different elements of it. I've been trying to find some kind of consensus in what has been said this morning, and I'm not sure that I've found it. However, I get the impression that there's some disagreement among us as to how bad the situation is. Some think it's very bad; some think it's been exaggerated. Whether it's this bad or that bad or totally bad, I don't think matters. I think we're all agreed that the situation is bad. As I said earlier, I'm not sure just how much we can do about the general system in education and its deterioration in the country as a whole. I guess Al Shanker is a little more optimistic than I am.

Al Shanker: I didn't say that.

William Phillips: I'm sorry. But I think we should concentrate on the question of what's been called the politically correct, on the intolerance that's been taking place in the universities.

Celeste Colgan: At the National Endowment for the Humanities, it is required of all public programs – specifically of films produced for public television – that perspectives be heard out in an evenhanded way. This requirement is necessary because, as a federal agency, the NEH has a responsibility to the taxpayers who make its programs possible. Taxpayers do not want their dollars spent on projects that harangue them. Therefore the NEH must not support a film that seeks to persuade its viewers of particular political, philosophical, religious, or ideological points of view, or that advocates a particular program of social action or change. It's a criterion against which our evaluators judge all applications, and it's part of an informal contract that we at the Endowment observe between ourselves and the people of the United States. The rationale of the requirement, however, is not just a prohibition against waste, that is, not just to keep offensive and polemic programs from being underwritten by the federal government. Even more important than such a great good is that people gain understanding in an unprejudiced atmosphere. And that they learn. People add to their store of knowledge when information and opinion are presented evenhandedly. It's the difference between indoctrination and education, between re-education and en-

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richment, between soapbox oratory and teaching.

Take, for example, Ken Burns's documentary film, *The Civil War*. In that eleven-hour documentary, stories of the war were told from the point of view of a soldier's mother, a northern factory worker, a southern hospital volunteer, a Tennessee plowboy turned infantryman, an enlisted volunteer from Maine, from the point of view of generals – South and North – and from the point of view of presidents – South and North. No single story line was allowed to dominate; people spoke for themselves, and viewers carried away an enriched understanding of the Civil War. In the best tradition of providing an atmosphere for learning, NEH insists that the documentaries it supports present a range of views. NEH seeks to assure its television audiences that the truth about the subject will emerge, not from any one, but from several perspectives. In living rooms and television classrooms NEH seeks to safeguard a freedom to learn, a freedom that should be cherished and protected as an important part of academic freedom.

I've been told that it's ironic and a bit futile that we in the federal government are protective of the atmosphere for learning in an age when so little dialogue about freedom to learn is taking place on university campuses. And I have been asked by critics of the NEH why the agency doesn't see its role as funding the most talented filmmakers, regardless of their biases, why NEH doesn't assume that balance will inevitably emerge from the mix of programs. The American people are not forced to watch what the government funds, they say. This is an argument that is easy to engage. First, NEH does fund the best filmmakers, when we can find them. It takes an uncommon sensitivity to be able to produce a documentary with a balance of perspectives. And it is true, people do have the freedom to turn their television sets off, but why should they have to pay for the thing that offends them? Finally – and this is the most important point – a biased program predictably doesn't offend so much as it bores. In 1986 we listened to a tiresome litany of blame that Western civilization should bear for the travails of Africa in Ali Mazrui's *The Africans*. In April this year we can submit ourselves to a five-hour flogging on public television for the United States' Latin American policies from Carlos Fuentes in his film, *The Buried Mirror*. These programs are dull. The cinematography is sometimes nice, but the product is tedious.

I do not mean to suggest that making a good documentary is the same as preparing a good classroom presentation, but the effects are the same. A good documentary like a good classroom session engages; it opens issues; it pursues truth; it transmits knowledge, it respects its audience. NEH guidelines for balance parallel in their intent the American

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Association of University Professors' Statement of Rights and Freedoms of Students, which says in part:

> The professor of the classroom and in conference should encourage free discussion, inquiry, and expression. Student performance should be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not on opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards.

In preparation for this meeting, we were asked about effective ways of countering political positions without engaging in the politics behind them. One of the most effective ways to emphasize students' freedom to learn is to emphasize good teaching. Other tactics fail. We remember what happened to the debate about the canon. People became concerned about what was being taught under the rubric of literature. Several observed that there was more Alice Walker than Shakespeare in college English classes. The counterargument was inevitable, as illustrated by the press release on the MLA's survey of nineteenth-century British and American literature courses. The MLA pointed out that "there is no evidence that college faculty members have abandoned traditional texts." Indeed Dickens, Melville, and Whitman do appear on most reading lists. However, the approaches that teachers employ, as reported by the same survey, left no doubt as to how the works are presented: sixty-two percent of professors said they used a feminist approach, and twenty-eight percent said they used a Marxist approach.

Students exposed to single, polemic approaches to literature are deprived of their freedom to learn. They have no way to engage ideas if they are told what to think. Students merely come away from literature classes with an adroitness for examining artifacts as manifestations of hegemonic oppression, or with a skill for translating words and images into sexual fantasy. If they have been harangued, they most often have been bored. They have no experience with considerations of value, considerations of beauty, of truth. We can say of these classrooms – as we say in federal government – that in there is waste, fraud, and abuse. Waste of money. Why should parents have to pay for soapbox oratory? Fraudulent scholarship. Why should our fine research institutions harbor the bogus scholarship that sometimes goes by the name of feminist theory? And student abuse. Why do some faculty abrogate students' freedom to learn?

Now we are embroiled in talk about political correctness. And the counterargument is again predictable. We have people saying – among them the Teachers for a Democratic Culture – there's no political correctness. There's only your politics and my politics. A way to leap over classroom politics and begin constructive discussion is to focus on aca-

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demic standards. The movement advocating national standards and a system of assessments for our elementary and secondary schoolchildren is one of the most promising on our horizon. People who care about the changing culture of the university should investigate ways to get involved in helping the schools. They should encourage their state to develop curriculum frameworks that would link up with national standards, and they should encourage professional development opportunities for bringing teaching up to those standards. Once standards in elementary and secondary schools gain wide acceptance, professors will be held accountable. Their students are future teachers who must have a firm mastery of content. Theory and political approaches to history and literature shrink in the face of the serious business of academic standards. Professors will politicize college classrooms at their own peril.

The National Council for Education Standards and Testing, a bipartisan group co-chaired by the governors of Colorado and South Carolina, have set in place task forces to develop and implement national standards and a system of assessments in English, math, science, geography, and history. This effort has the best potential for insuring that future teachers are given opportunities to learn and that incumbent teachers are encouraged to reinvigorate their teaching with a better understanding of the subjects they teach.

William Phillips: That's a wonderful statement. It is almost utopian. How would you enforce it? Our problem is that these things don't seem to be enforceable.

Celeste Colgan: These standards, or what?

William Phillips: For teachers to teach and not propagandize, for example.

Celeste Colgan: I think the dialogue needs to be shifted. We need to redefine what good teaching is, instead of rejecting people's politics.

Ronald Radosh: On the question of interpretation. I don't recall exactly how you phrased it, but it isn't just a matter of leaving politics out. Let's say there's an election campaign going on, you wouldn't want a teacher in the humanities, in history, or in the social sciences to come out and say, "I want you to support Clinton for this reason," or "I want you to support Bush for that reason." That kind of politics has to be left out of a class. But speaking for history, you can't really leave your views out. Because when dealing with history, we're presenting an interpretation. You have to let the students know that you're not

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dealing in an exact science such as physics. But there are serious people who do not see it the same way. We would all agree, for example, that Eugene Genovese, who writes from a Marxist perspective, has written some of the most penetrating discussion reevaluating the understanding of slavery. No one objects to that kind of debate: It's based on interpreting the facts and letting the students see how you see it and why. But it is objectionable when somebody comes into a field, telling students how to think.

Digby Baltzell: How could you enforce that, though? What bothers me about PC are the rules about what it is permissible to say and what is not. I am convinced that society cannot run with these rules. You're suggesting that it's common decency to state what your point of view is, to say, "I have a point of view. I want to sharpen yours with mine." But we don't use terms like "common decency" anymore. I have to think that we will win out, because the opposition hasn't got anything.

Roger Kimball: I agree that it is important to present competing views. But, as I remarked earlier, we have to be careful not to think that the truth lies in some kind of specious middle – that somehow by splitting the difference we come closer to the truth.

C. Vann Woodward: I don't think we're going to enforce anything. This is not a type of system that can use enforcement about important things, and it's going to get worse. What I think we need to do, as best we can, is to strongly assert our objectives and our values about the institution of the university, what it's about, and what it does. One way of doing that is to make clear what we are not and are not supposed to be, and should not try to be. One of these negative identity definitions which has been made pretty strongly already is that we are not a political or ideological institution and are not set to promote any politics or any ideology. Individuals in the system undoubtedly will have their own political views, and they will become known as they teach. But as an institution, no. The faculty's not selected for its ideology but for other qualities.

A second, negative definition is that we are not a philanthropic organization. I know I'll be challenged strongly on this, especially in this sense of need-blind education, which is very expensive. It can be defined as philanthropic, but that's not its purpose. Its purpose is to seek talent, ability, and to furnish the means for students to get an education, regardless of their ability to pay. That's not what I call philanthropy; it's not trying to do good unto people by improving their self-opinion or flattering their egos or promoting the prestige of their particular group

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or color or sex. That's not what it's about. I don't think the university is or should be attempting to be therapeutic. It's not designed to solve people's personal problems. We should rid ourselves of them and let that be known. People of prominence and esteem and authority ought to speak out and let their views be known. I could make a speech about what the university should do, but I'll refrain from that. You all make your living that way. But I would be satisfied if we would assert ourselves strongly about what we are not supposed to do.

Jean Elshtain: I agree with Vann Woodward. But first I wanted to respond to Celeste's comments about the freedom to learn and good teaching. Good teachers require good students, students with the capacity to sit still and be disciplined, to get their homework in on time and so on. To do so, students need stable homes. If we want to have a large impact on education, we must promulgate public policies that support stable two-parent households. All the evidence we have from research on the family indicates that a kid gets a better start in life on every scale – education, employment, and so on – if that child has a stable home life. But in the last several decades we have seen the deinstitutionalization of the family. This has had devastating consequences, particularly in the minority community. We have elementary school teachers who quit teaching, not just because there isn't enough money in it, but because more and more kids are angry and disoriented. They come in and want to beat up other kids, and there's no one you can talk to about it. The parents are not there or are too strapped to pay attention. But whenever you talk about family issues, you're immediately called a reactionary. We must resist that. So you can't deal with education in isolation; you've got to look at the wider social ecology. If we were to move toward public policies to help keep families stable, we'd see some real changes. Look at a group of kids and see who's most at risk for poverty. It is the one who isn't in a two-parent household.

C. Vann Woodward: Would you want to be identified with the idea that the university should assume social responsibility for the stability of the American family?

Jean Elshtain: No. I was talking about the elementary school and about what kids bring to the classroom, whether or not families there are involved in the educational process and can support and sustain the notion of discipline, of doing homework, and so on. If we're looking at what is to be done, for education, I think we can't do that in isolation.

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Abigail Thernstrom: In principle I would promote public policies that help sustain stable families. But we don't know how to put the inner-city black family back together. I also have a question about national standards, national exams. I'm for that in principle. But I'm concerned that the zany multiculturalists will soon take over such exams and such a curriculum.

Edith Kurzweil: I think you all are correct. The only way we can succeed, it seems, would be to have some input at every level. In other words, try and raise standards in elementary schools, from Head Start on through high schools and into universities. And at the same time do something, I don't know what, to change the drift. To call it family morals sounds too simplistic. We need to have some kind of input there, maybe by having a close look at some of the existing policies. But these are real hot potatoes. We address abortion and welfare policies separately, so that abortions are curtailed at the same time that we cut welfare payments, thereby increasing the number of children born to kids of fourteen and sixteen. I don't have a solution, but we must realize that these issues count and that we cannot prohibit sexual intercourse. So we get into the whole mess of condoms or no condoms, for instance. There are so many problems. I don't think any one of us knows exactly what to do. But I think we have to look at the situation in some kind of total way, as well as in particular ways.

Roger Kimball: Mr. Woodward, I agree completely with your characterization of what would be desirable. Unfortunately, the situation you sketched cannot be obtained now. The university is widely regarded as a political institution. The question is, what can we do to change it? I also agree with what Jean said. I wish that we could bolster the family and improve social conditions, but I'll leave that to one side for a moment. It seems to be beyond the purview of the culture of the university, today's topic, even if it stands in the background. Perhaps conferences like this are a good idea. Certainly writing and speaking in as prominent places as possible is a good idea. Also trying to inform the alumni of universities about what's going on, contacting parents – many of whom pay exorbitant fees to keep their kids in the classroom – and telling them what's actually happening. These are small but effective public relations efforts. It's a public relations battle for the moral high ground. What we need to do is find strategies to inform those people who really are concerned in the universities.

William Phillips: Does anyone know anything about the trustees? Are they reachable?

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Digby Baltzell: I talked about this to a leading trustee of the University of Pennsylvania for three and a half hours. At the end she said, "I agree with every single thing you've just said, but I was afraid to say it." This happened again and again, but they never say anything.

C. Vann Woodward: We must not fall into the idea that we have to provide people with comforts and self-satisfaction. That isn't our function.

Edith Kurzweil: I think it goes beyond that. If you're at a faculty meeting, and you suddenly look up and notice that three-quarters of your colleagues are aghast at what you're saying, even if some of them agree with you over lunch but now are afraid to speak up, you feel isolated, and you learn to shut up.

C. Vann Woodward: We're divided, but that's normal, and we should accept that.

Edith Kurzweil: Yes. But the threat of being called a conservative and a fascist scares people off.

Jean Elshtain: I would like to say that I am concerned, not with sexual morality, but with more basic political and economic facts. Over the last three decades, the tax structure is much less supportive of families with children than it used to be. And this could be fixed. After some time, it would have an enormous impact on what happens to kids in school, on their behavior and relationships. I think we've more and more thrown in the towel.

Irving Louis Horowitz: Maybe you are living in a different environment. But we have to recognize that we represent a very select, stratified group. We do not represent the university as such. We do not represent the schools of engineering, of medicine, of business schools. The overwhelming preponderance of people at the university remain attached and dedicated to the democratic culture. We are really talking about policy-related areas in the marketplace of ideas, and I'd like to emphasize the word "marketplace." It is a very even struggle within our narrow world. In the larger picture I think Digby's right. There is no doubt that the victory will be with democratic culture. In the narrow world it is a bit of a struggle, but not an uneven one, nothing we need to be unduly pessimistic about. I was jotting down names of journals on our side – *Partisan Review*, *The Public Interest*, *The National Interest*, *The American*

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Spectator, The New Republic, Policy Review, The American Scholar, The New Criterion.

On the other side are very powerful protagonists – the university presses. Eighty or eighty-five percent of them are dedicated to politically correct analyses. The struggle is one of ideas translated into a marketplace of ideas. I think before we leap to what can be done we ought to be very cautious and try to negotiate new societies, new agencies, new institutional forces. The whole world of research is not in the university. The marketplace is speaking to us within the university, and there is reason for an enormous amount of optimism. Transaction runs thirty-five journals, and every one of them has a market, because a democratic culture is small, not because it is big. We have to recognize the spread of American society, or we would be subject to the charge of conservatism. We have to be careful that our struggle is a struggle for democratic culture, not for a non-ideological point of view, but for a very ideological point of view. Democracy itself is on the line. That is what's critical.

Heather MacDonald: One of the things that's been battled over in the marketplace of ideas, however, is rhetoric, as Roger Kimball said. You mention democratic culture. That's precisely what the Teachers for a Democratic Culture are claiming, to have a monopoly on democracy, to be the ones representing democratic forums, democratic curricula and reforms in admissions policy. I think what's important in getting our message out is in fact that our commitment to standards, that meritocracy is precisely a democratic tradition which allows people, regardless of their background, race or color to go as far as they possibly can. That position is far more compatible with an open society than one that allocates resources based on someone's gender or ethnic affiliation. This society obviously had a dreadful racist past, but I think there are certain standards that do transcend narrow parochial interests. It is not racist to argue for standards.

Jean Elshtain: I think we're getting to the heart of what's going on, that is, the battle over our interest in democracy itself. When I entered the academy in the early seventies, if you had standards or were talking in a certain way, you were accused of being elitist or male-identified. Part of what has been going on since the 1970s has been a battle over the understanding of democracy. As Martin Luther King said, "Judge people by the quality of their character and not by the color of their skin or by their gender."

James Farganis: On the question of this struggle for the definition of democracy you have two competing schools – a procedural and a sub-

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stantive one. It seems to me Irving talked about the liberal conception of democracy, a set of procedures with outcomes that are a consequence of the regular processes of debate, of majority rule, and so on. But people have moved to a different conception of democracy, where the outcomes are far more important than the process. If you engage in fair play, they say you're really being racist because you're not taking into account the history of others in order to make a "fair judgment." So if you say "I don't care about the color of your skin, I'm just going to grade your paper," and you grade it blind, you are already called racist, because you're not taking history into account. The outcomes of democracy now are felt to be far more significant than what we used to associate with the liberal democratic order. That's a very hard problem, given the political reality and the function of the university in a politicized context. There are a whole range of interconnected questions that are not so easy to resolve. It's not just a question of rhetoric, or a public relations game.

Wilson Moses: You are correct is saying that one standard should apply. I don't know any black scholar who would disagree with you on that. I don't think Teachers for a Democratic Culture would disagree with that. My objection to the National Association of Scholars and Teachers for a Democratic Culture is that both have inflated conceptions of their own importance. The more moderate leaders in the latter organization, like Henry Louis Gates, have vigorously opposed exactly the sort of foolishness you refer to. Perhaps you saw Professor Gates's recent essay in *The New York Times*, "The Lesson of Little Tree. " In every organization there are persons who are motivated simply by a desire for power. I see them as throwbacks to the old days of American politics, when Boss Tweed, Jay Gould, and George Armstrong Custer gave us the historical definition of American democracy. But none of us want to return to that old-fashioned definition of democracy. I think the newer definitions are better.

Al Shanker: I think that this exchange is most important. As in any political discussion, we talk about ideas. But at the same time, you win or lose not on the abstract terms of the argument but by convincing large numbers of people. That is what the other side is trying to do, to use one set of ideas in promoting their interest. Or they work it two ways. They tell some people, "If there are standards you're going to be cut out, so it's in your interest not to have them." And they tell the others that they're going to feel guilty, because to go for standards is to represent their own narrow self-interest and exclude all those other folks. But it seems to me that our side often tends to avoid stating why it is in

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everybody's interest to hold on to standards.

Back in '69, less than a year after the teacher strikes, there was an election among paraprofessionals in New York City. They were basically welfare mothers, high school drop-outs who were hired to help teachers in classrooms. At the time it was an anti-poverty program, and we competed with another union to represent them.

At first, the majority of blacks and Hispanics (about ninety-five percent) voted for us. But soon we had a problem, because each white teacher now had a black or Hispanic paraprofessional in the classroom – it looked like they each had a "maid." Because that was not a tolerable situation, we negotiated to provide paraprofessionals with the ability to get a college education. A committee of these paraprofessionals then asked to get credits for life experience. I told them that those credits would not count anywhere else. They bought it. Six thousand out of ten thousand went to college, three thousand graduated and became teachers by meeting regular standards, not special standards.

I think we ought to try to sell the idea that youngsters who are building up large debts and remaining in college for six years are not getting anything marketable out of it. If we look at other societies, it's not a question of bringing some people into the university and keeping others out. The issue is to look to alternative provisions for continuing education that would add marketable educational value. This issue has to be addressed by students, faculty, and parents. It goes beyond the value of maintaining standards. We need also to deal with all the audiences that have an interest in what we're doing, and to show that what the other side is proposing is destructive. We should appeal to all groups and not just to the elite.

C. Vann Woodward: I'd like to make another point. It was said that women have come into society only recently. It seems to me that women have been in society in the most important positions for thousands of years, and they've just found that out. Is being a wife being out of society?

Heather MacDonald: Obviously it's just a matter of semantics. What you call society is a system of economics. Is it a society of economics or is it domestic society?

Jean Elshtain: I think it's fair to say that women's contributions often went unrecognized.

Digby Baltzell: I feel as bad about it as you do. But walking around the square all day with children on ropes, what kind of society is that?

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Wilson Moses: We focus on the family because we think of it as the fundamental institution. The burden of Jean Elshtain's remarks is that there has to be some kind of understanding of how the institutions in society interlock. But the debates in universities have to do with things other than the debate between people on two extremes. Most people are not on either of those extremes. I think of myself, Lynne Cheney, and E. D. Hirsch as being in the middle. I see the general Hollywoodization of American society as a problem. It's creeping into the family, into the home, into the presidency. The fact is, we're beginning to think of professorships as a step on the way to the Academy Awards. This is the problem, and it's not particular to any racial or ethnic group, but a problem of American life.

William Phillips: I gather you would define the politically correct people at one extreme. What is the other extreme?

Wilson Moses: At the other extreme I would put the people who feel that feminists don't have any legitimate point of view whatever. It would be a position which would assume that a black person who is speaking must be anti-Semitic. I think it's those kinds of extremes that are prevalent in America today.

William Phillips: Do you think that's a force in the academy?

Wilson Moses: Yes, I think it is. However, it's not a large force. It's a minority.

Roger Kimball: I could spend the rest of the afternoon giving you candidates who populate the PC extreme. I'd be hard-pressed to come up with people on the other extreme. I'm sure there are individuals who could be mentioned, but most are without power. The other side is also the dominant tendency in the university, even if the rank-and-file are in the middle; they subscribe to Jean Elshtain's point of view, a point of view that is continually pilloried in the publications of the MLA.

Wilson Moses: People have mentioned here that they've spoken to others who agree with them privately but don't want to articulate their position publicly. I think, as a matter of fact, lots of people have had these experiences. And certainly we can name a lot of people in the middle. I've been more inclined in my remarks to refer specifically by name to those who I think represent this middle.

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William Phillips: Do any of you believe that anything should or can be done organizationally? Are you opposed to that?

C. Vann Woodward: I think there are some powerful people who are speaking for our viewpoint in the institution, and I think we ought to use them for what it's worth in promoting our ideas and asserting our values.

William Phillips: What kind of organization are you referring to?

C. Vann Woodward: The university.

William Phillips: I see, take advantage of the university itself.

C. Vann Woodward: There are publications and faculty who have influence. That's an organization. I think it would be difficult to suggest another type of organization that could advance the cause further. Members of the American academy have a unity they don't express, and they've been divided by fear of offending, of being out of line, or of being politically incorrect. We've got to regain our confidence and assert our values, and that's not primarily an organizational matter but an individual one – a profession of good teaching.

Irving Louis Horowitz: There are already many, many organizations that did not exist ten years ago or twenty years ago. In sociology, for instance, you now have a complete spin-off of demography, five national associations of criminology, three national associations of urban affairs. People are not hidebound or locked into their old professional associations.

William Phillips: What roles do these organizations play? What is their nature?

Irving Louis Horowitz: They advance the debate and provide a hospitable environment for research. If a demographer wants to do serious demography, it is not feasible within the demographic society itself. These groups are not uniform in political orientation. But their purpose is to provide hospitable environments within a university or within the larger world of learning. The Rand Corporation in California is a hospitable environment; so are Lincoln Laboratories and Research Associates. Many of the people at this table have, I'm sure, multiple associations, professional as well as non-professional. Academic life is remarkably different than it was fifteen or twenty years ago. In the area of political sci-

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ence, twenty-five years ago, you couldn't name ten associations of a national sort. Now there are around seventy-five. That is a very important aspect of democracy and points to openness.

William Phillips: Are you saying that these professional organizations are serving as a corrective to the left ideology?

Irving Louis Horowitz: Yes. Another thing that has to be said with some frankness is the change in the orientation of all the publications. Certainly you cannot talk about *Partisan Review* in 1990 the way it was in 1952. It is a different entity.

William Phillips: You can't talk about Horowitz the same way.

Irving Louis Horowitz: That is right, although I feel that I've changed very little.

Marjorie Iseman: Is there an organization which has the sole purpose of doing what we have in mind, of working with the universities or within them, as you say, to collect information and really openly try to influence them in the direction you've been talking about?

Irving Louis Horowitz: There is one such organization, the National Association of Scholars.

Edith Kurzweil: When we broach this question broadly, some people tend to flinch. They feel they don't want an organization; they want to talk just for themselves. And, to take off from what Irving said, we have plenty of organizations. Sometimes it's much more difficult to come out as individuals, to state a strong point that will offend some colleagues. However, I would add that we may become more effective by having meetings like this one. I think by talking to each other and to all those who are willing to read us, and those who are going to think about what we're writing, we might have some impact – without frittering away our energy in yet another organization. I think we're really talking about ideas – which we hope to get across.

Ronald Radosh: I think what Irving said may be true in other fields. In American history there are still only a few limited journals that record the ever-changing trends. In each year's convention bulletin of the Organization of American Historians, almost every session is about gender, class, race. There was an article in the *Journal of American History* about the Leo Frank murder in Atlanta in the 1920's. It was a long,

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well-documented article based on sound historical scholarship in terms of archival research and footnotes. But the last three paragraphs were not about Atlanta in the 1920s or about the Jews: they were about Reagan and Bush and about how we have to increase our struggle against their policies. You would never have seen a conclusion like this twenty years ago in a scholarly journal. And this is typical now.

Celeste Colgan: For some reason – maybe it's endemic to the very nature of scholastic organizations where officers are elected through delegates – the people who go through the chairs of those organizations get onto the executive board whose president can say, "I speak for thirty thousand members." Thus these organizations are a powerful force. I can predict that as we go into spring and the President announces the next nominees for the National Council on the Humanities, the fact that a good number of them belong to the National Association of Scholars – an affinity organization, not relying on delegate assembly – is going to be an issue.

Irving Louis Horowitz: Ron, I am not in the area of history, but I would like to say that every single field is marching to its own drummer. But in the last twenty years, right off the top of my head, three fine journals – *History and Theory*, *History and Social Science*, and *American Ethnic History* – have been established, and you could publish in them any day of the week. Now I am not saying that the proliferation has gone as deep as it has in political science, but that is because of the attrition within history per se, and is not necessarily a function of political correctness or political ideology.

William Phillips: Do you agree, Ron?

Ronald Radosh: I don't know what the attrition is. But speaking only for American history, for some unique reason many of the people who got doctorates in it, who have now come into the university as professors and have moved up the ladder, are former new left activists. They have come to dominate the field.

Irving Louis Horowitz: It is true, but an editor like Ron Bayer will always welcome you. We must avoid excessive pessimism as if somehow we are attending a wake.

Heather MacDonald: It seems that you can encourage individual professors, as Mr. Woodward suggests, to speak their minds. And yet when they do, they get ostracized. I want to ask Abigail Thernstrom what her

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husband's experience was, if any other professors at Harvard were willing to take his side or if there was silence on the part of the administration. Did any colleagues speak up? How are we going to encourage an environment where people are not fearful of being boycotted by students or denounced by faculty?

Abigail Thernstrom: True, the administration did nothing but quake in its boots. It was silent. Derek Bok should have come out swinging for the freedom of professors in a classroom setting, should have engaged in a debate with students responding in the appropriate ways. But the administration was very intimidated by the black students. And Stephen couldn't look to the trustees. They're the problem, not the solution. You can't look to them any more than you can look to the Republicans to be anti-quota. Who brought us quotas? The Nixon administration. I'm delighted that Irving Horowitz is an anti-alarmist voice. Effort isn't useless, but my feeling is that you've got a generational phenomenon here that's got to play itself out. In the meantime, scholars should get on with their own individual work. After all, Stephen Thernstrom is still the Winthrop Professor of History at Harvard. That's a very cushy job. No one is stopping him from doing his kind of scholarship. He's working on a book with me now, and we haven't had any trouble selling it to one of the major publishers. So you've got to put this in perspective.

The problem is that our opponents worship different gods. Debate is very difficult. You can talk, as Al Shanker did, about appealing to the self-interest of your opponents, saying we're all in this together and we all have common interests. The people who disagree with us frame the issues very differently. They really do believe that academic standards are at odds with racial and social justice. It's like saying to Benjamin Hooks, for instance on the busing question, well, it wasn't in the interest of black kids for the white middle class to flee the public school systems. That's a hopeless argument. And I go back to what Wilson Moses said, the power grab was in the interest of urban whites. They've taken over the public school system. I just don't think we're going to win these arguments.

Al Shanker: I wasn't trying to win them by winning over our opponents. A number of people have said that one side of the debate gets a lot more time, at least on campuses if not in journals, or with professional organizations and publishers, because there's a fear on the part of others that the only voice that's heard is on the other side. If that's true, it can be taken care of easily: just have fairly frequent polls of people in the academy, and I think this will show that the overwhelming majority

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are nowhere near that extreme. We conducted three very large polls in the California college system, a couple in the Florida system and two more in one of the three Illinois systems. The left spectrum represents in most places, including California, a very small percentage. Now, the super-conservatives are even smaller. It's basically a very solid, sensible center. The amazing thing was how similar California is to Illinois and Florida and New Jersey. State-wide systems look pretty much alike. You might fund some outfit to periodically take polls on what academics think because that may mold the minds of people. Putting that out will convince a lot of people that they won't be alone if they speak out. They may still think it's not worth having the discussion; they may feel it's more important to publish an article or a book, or to take care of their own courses or to do something else. But we'd at least get away from the question of isolating ourselves. If I were in charge, that's what I'd do. I'd get the facts out and show that most of the people are where we are. We ought to show it by appearing in meetings and having speakers on campus.

William Phillips: Who's going to do it? You're talking about organization now, aren't you?

Al Shanker: In elementary and secondary education there's a magazine called *Phi Delta Kappan* and they publish an annual Gallup poll on attitudes toward education issues. They've been doing it for about twenty years. You might very well get some foundation – with a fairly diverse advisory body – that would deal with these questions. A lot of these Gallup questions are the same year after year; new ones could be added. I don't know that you'd need an organization to do that.

C. Vann Woodward: I argued against unnecessary pessimism. But I would like to put in a word for necessary pessimism. Some of these organizations give in. A notable example is the MLA. It is a disgrace to the profession. It consists of people who are afraid to offend. I was in the chair when, in 1969, the American Historical Association came within a few votes of capitulating to converting itself to a political organization, to endorse the programs and the policies of the government. This can happen, and that's what I mean by necessary pessimism.

William Phillips: I agree with Vann Woodward. I think some of us are underestimating what's going on; we're sort of bending over backwards. I personally think the situation is very bad. And I think we're engaged in an intellectual struggle. That is, the people we're opposed to are the people who are fairly dominant in most of the universities. And

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they are at a low intellectual level; their facts are often wrong, their theories crazy: they are special pleaders of causes and don't take rational arguments into account. If I may make an analogy, it is to the struggle in the thirties and forties. There are differences of course – anybody can point them out – but there are some similarities. We were in a fight against the control of the media and the publishing houses, not so much the academy, against the Stalinists and their followers. We pointed out that we were superior – in our writing, in our thinking, in our fidelity to facts, and that we were not part of what they called us – agents of imperialism, literary snakes, reactionaries, conservatives. You can't be afraid of being called all those things.

But, to get back to my main point, it was an intellectual struggle. Obviously this isn't Stalinist Russia or Hitler's Germany. Of course you can write books, of course you can continue to teach. Not everyone's getting fired. But the dominant tendency, it seems to me, is the tendency that has been labeled, correctly or incorrectly, politically correct. I think there's only one way of fighting it: to define it as a general position and to argue against its specific manifestations. For example, you have to show that some of the people who are writing about Columbus, such as Stephen Greenblatt and Kirkpatrick Sale, are writing nonsense. You can't fight it any other way. There may be a sufficient number of people who are able to recognize the distinction between sense and nonsense, between higher and lower levels of thinking. So I'm arguing really for intensifying the intellectual aspects of this struggle.

Edith Kurzweil: I was going to say this somewhat differently. I think most of us are academics and intellectuals and, to put it somewhat bluntly, not all academics are intellectuals. And we want to differentiate between writing for scholarly, narrow journals and for publications like *Partisan Review*, *The New Criterion*, *Society*, and all of the others. The other thing I wanted to say, which came to mind while you were talking, Celeste, is about the upcoming battle. It started long ago. I recall a meeting of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, which William had started. I was there, not as a participant, but as an observer who was kept outside the official meeting. We were all going to the movies afterwards, and a couple of people were chanting, "We've won. We've won. We've got fifty-one percent." Since then, that organization went to the point of not even considering *Partisan Review* worthy of the maximum ten thousand dollar grant because we were called the establishment, even though, like all little literary magazines, we're always losing money. In other words, what has happened more and more is really a struggle for victims. And whoever is the victim is going to win.

Just one more point. I spoke to Eugene Genovese. He told me why

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neither he nor Betsy could be with us today. And he mentioned that Betsy had built a superb women's studies program of high intellectual and professional quality with absolutely no line. Betsy, of course, is a radical and yet had invited conservatives as well as leftists to participate in colloquia, even a few conservative men. "Well, you guessed it," Gene said. The university caved in to a few left-wing extremists and has forced her resignation. "Matters are much worse than people are willing to say," he went on, "and they are destined to get worse." You all know that Gene is a Marxist. I don't know where that leaves us, but I think we should be able to recognize that such things happen in some places.

William Phillips: I want to add a footnote, a political point. The literary magazine organization that I started under the aegis of the National Endowment for the Arts, which Roger Stevens used to head, deteriorated terribly. It became vulgar, it became populist. A magazine called *Fuck You* got a grant. That was a magazine of the arts. That probably was the low point of the organization. But I wanted to add that this started under a Democratic administration. And when a Republican administration came in there was no change. In spite of all this Reagan- and Bush-bashing, under their administrations there wasn't a single change in the administration of the arts. We continued with the same nonsense, funded the same junk, went on with the same stupidity with no change whatsoever.

Edith Kurzweil: Maybe I should add one more footnote. I thought the culmination of it was reached when, one year, the elected council of the literary organization I mentioned decided to be really democratic. Some magazines had asked for five hundred dollars, and others for between ten and twenty thousand dollars. Yet it was decided, in the name of democracy, to divide the pot, to give everybody nine hundred and fifty-three dollars.

William Phillips: That's democracy in action.

Jean Elshtain: Like Gene Genovese we've all come to recognize that the intellectual climate, the political culture of the academy is sort of fragile. It doesn't take very much for determined people to take it over. People like myself, when I call myself a militant moderate, easily are labeled right-wing. I'm concerned about what happens to students: it encourages a kind of timidity. They watch which way the wind is blowing and often jump on this bandwagon or that one. What gets lost in this process, once things have taken that kind of turn, is what the academy is supposed to be all about, which is the staking out of positions in an

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atmosphere in which there is authentic exchange and debate and in which people of good will are not being penalized for taking an unpopular position. The response of most academics, and most academics are not profiles in courage, is to retreat, to step back into their offices, to close their doors. This means, again, that the people who do the defining gain yet more power. Pessimism is warranted, because it doesn't take very much for a situation to move in this direction. It's a fragile world. And it is hard to work our way back to a sort of intellectual playing field, where ideas can be debated, where we are allowed to label ourselves instead of being labeled by others. We are in a world of labeling mania, where you've got to wear a team jersey before people will know whether they will talk to you or not. That has to be attacked at every turn, but we can't count on most of our colleagues to do it.

Ronald Radosh: Edith said Gene got upset because something hit home with him, happened on his own campus. Perhaps he's exaggerating, perhaps he isn't. But Abigail Thernstrom said, "Look, my husband still has a cushy job, it wasn't such a big deal."

Abigail Thernstrom: It was a big deal.

Ronald Radosh: As you know, what's going on all around the country is said to be much ado about nothing, that it's exaggerated by the right wing to make an issue where there is none. I think we have to be careful to say that in fact something is happening. I can see that soon there will be a commentary, probably in *The Nation* that nothing indeed happened to Betsy Genovese, because she should have resigned; that she was forced out because she was incompetent – and people will be reading it all over the country.

Abigail Thernstrom: I don't want to be misunderstood. Of course what happened was very serious; the university should have come clean. Gene describes it exactly. As everybody knows, Stephen Thernstrom cancelled the course. He couldn't start tape-recording every conversation he had with students, so that he could defend himself the next time he was accused.

Digby Baltzell: Back in the thirties, the whole press hated Roosevelt. Yes, the owners of the press hated him but damn near the whole working press was for him. Then, administrations were concerned. Today, the administration and those who have their fingers on the power are politically correct, on the left.

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William Phillips: Tell us about this poll business, Al.

Al Shanker: I think it's possible to get sponsorship for such a poll on a regular basis and to establish more legitimacy for our position. It seems that there are an awful lot of people around the country who disagree with the left. Whether people want to get personally involved is still another question. But at least it would be a step.

Marjorie Iseman: Was your first poll of universities only?

Al Shanker: Yes. I'm talking about state-wide universities we were trying to organize or where we were being challenged. There were differences. For example, I had thought that a lot of the faculty agreed with the viewpoints expressed by the national organization.

Abigail Thernstrom: Were these elite schools?

Al Shanker: No. We polled the Florida college system, the New Jersey college system, the Board of Governors system in Illinois, and the college system in California.

William Phillips: Al, I didn't understand the point you made about constituting only twenty-two percent.

Al Shanker: I meant faculty who favored quotas, who held more extreme views on bilingual education and so on.

William Phillips: But isn't that a high percentage?

Al Shanker: It's high in terms of the general population. But it is not a majority, especially when the others hold an opposite point of view.

William Phillips: Did you have twenty/eighty?

Al Shanker: Yes. There were very few who said they didn't care or they didn't know.

William Phillips: But the organized twenty percent represents a very potent force.

Al Shanker: The twenty percent isn't well-organized either; about three percent are. But, basically, there are twenty percent who agree with them.

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William Phillips: I see.

C. Vann Woodward: Of course if there are that many, if there's that percentage of people with intelligence and integrity and courage, I would be surprised. But I don't believe that that other side, if described by those terms, is eighty percent. The minorities are important if you can get representatives of them. If you can come out strongly, I think it's important to do so.

William Phillips: It seems to me that if eighty percent are opposed, we don't have to do anything.

Edith Kurzweil: William, you yourself spoke of a vocal minority and of a non-vocal majority.

Al Shanker: All this will do is help the non-vocal contingent to speak up. To let them know that if they speak up they won't be alone, and that a majority would stand by them.

Roger Kimball: It would be interesting to know what kind of results you'd get if you conducted that poll at Duke or at Princeton.

Jean Elshtain: I am not opposed to polling, but I'm just wondering how helpful that would be in getting at the issues we've been talking about. In part for some very good reasons. Our culture sustains and sometimes even celebrates the minority position, even a minority of one. I'm concerned that students see their timid professors withdrawing and allowing small groups to define the nature of intellectual discourse. For whatever they're learning in the classroom, they're also learning that if they're going to make their way it's best to till your own garden, do your own work, and pay no attention to what's going on around you, or to become part of a very determined and ideologically conformist group engaged in power play. That's the lesson that's being taught, and that's very unfortunate. I don't think we're going to change that through showing how many are moderates, or conservatives, or how they self-identify. Universities are peculiar also, because a few people can make all sorts of noise and have an influence far beyond their actual number. That's why it's so important, it seems to me, for people to speak out, to take a stand. For all the bruises one incurs that would do more than polling every institution.

Arthur Schlesinger: It would encourage people to see that they're not

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alone. It also might enlighten the public to see that these are not just hotbeds of looniness.

Marjorie Iseman: We'd have to see that it was published.

Al Shanker: It would be a very newsworthy item.

Roger Kimball: How much would that cost?

Al Shanker: Oh, it costs about thirty five thousand dollars to do a poll. A national poll would cost more.

Abigail Thernstrom: Do you have any age breakdown?

Al Shanker: Yes. I'll send you a copy.

Jean Elshtain: Are they young?

Al Shanker: No, it's a representative group. But there were differences by age, which you may want to look at and see.

Heather MacDonald: But if it's generational, given that today's students are tomorrow's scholars, I don't see how you have confidence in a rebirth of non-politicized scholarship.

Abigail Thernstrom: There are shifts in our culture. You're implying that you've got something cast in stone here, that generations of people are listening to faculty members delivering a certain message. It doesn't work that way.

Heather MacDonald: Because young people aren't listening? In fact, those who are listening are the ones who are motivated by the political message, and so they will represent, it seems to me, the university for several generations down the line.

Arthur Schlesinger: But impulses run their course. After a time people change their views.

Edith Kurzweil: I also think that we tend to generalize to our own situations, to where we happen to be, whether or not we're teaching. I became aware of that when, after the publication of the *Partisan Review* issue on "The Changing Culture of the University," I went on about a dozen radio shows in various parts of the country. I received the most

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incredible challenges, both from the hosts and from those who called in. Some of them hardly knew how to spell my name, others were entirely knowledgeable. One started out by saying that we all know that eighty percent of tax dollars go for education, and immediately put me on the defensive. In Boston, I was kept for two hours and the host and I had a real dialogue. One caller asked if I was familiar with black history, that after all civilization had started in Africa. On the other extreme, one person called in and said yes we do have to change what's going on, and what about introducing corporal punishment. The point is that we really have an incredible range out there of thinking about what happens in universities. I think the media could do much more to inform people.

Abigail Thernstrom: But remember the limits of indoctrination. The Soviets and East European press tried to shove communist propaganda down the throats of the populace, and it didn't take. Those of us who are parents try to shove propaganda down our kids' throats; it doesn't take.

Arthur Schlesinger: Children are too smart. They're rather cynical on the whole. I don't think a whole generation is being fooled. In the communist states, people had no alternative, and still they did not succeed.

William Phillips: I think there's no doubt that there will be change, but can we be sure it will be change for the better? As I understand it, deconstruction is very much on the decline. It no longer has the position it had at the universities.

Heather MacDonald: It's developed in many other forms. It may not call itself deconstruction, but there's a grab bag of ways of reading literature these days which have been influenced by deconstruction. Is there any connection between what professors are saying and what students are learning? It seems that now the discussion's going to the opposite extreme, which is, "Well, it doesn't really matter." Are we simply concerned about freedom of speech among professors?

Abigail Thernstrom: It's just a message to keep things in perspective. We're not saying it doesn't matter.

Arthur Schlesinger: It matters, but it's not the end of the world.

Roger Kimball: I don't know anybody who's saying it's the end of the world.

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Arthur Schlesinger: We tend to have apocalyptic reactions. There are problems, there are irritations. One way to overcome them and tame them is to denounce them or at least discuss them. Education has always been in a ferment. There's always an argument. And it's a good thing too. It is evidence of vitality.

Roger Kimball: Two things. First, there is going to be debate over it. But at some places that debate is not being allowed. One side only is represented, and everything else is castigated as right-wing propaganda. Second, when you have the president of the MLA publicly pronouncing that reading and writing are hegemonic "technologies of control," you have the academic equivalent of martial law, enforced by the largest, most powerful academic body in the country.

Arthur Schlesinger: It's the largest, but it's not the most powerful. Do you think all the members of the MLA agree with their president?

Roger Kimball: The rank and file do not. But the leaders do.

Arthur Schlesinger: But people pay no attention to it. They figure it's out for publicity. I don't think it's a powerful organization, in the sense that it exerts organizational discipline on its members.

Roger Kimball: But English professors, especially untenured ones, feel they have to join. To get a job they feel they have to go to the annual MLA convention. Graduate students and young professors feel they have to toe the line.

Arthur Schlesinger: That doesn't mean they obey the idiocies of whoever happens to be in charge.

Roger Kimball: If you look at the papers they present, it does. It shows their research.

Arthur Schlesinger: For reasons I don't fully understand, the English department is usually the focus of infection.

Celeste Colgan: You have to appreciate where the organizational power is. It's political power. These are the people the congressmen listen to. They listen to folks who say, "I represent thirty thousand people." It's not as if these organizations have power over the discipline, or even that they really change what goes on in the classroom. Their power

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isn't to redirect the study of language and literature; it is a very, very distinct political power. And that's something different.

William Phillips: There's also some control of jobs. We know some political scientists and a sociologist who, take my word for it, are very competent. They can't get jobs because the ruling powers in specific departments won't give them jobs.

Digby Baltzell: Are they white males? Is that the trouble?

Irving Louis Horowitz: Well, that is politics for you. If you run three times, you lose, and then you win. The people who are winning presidential elections in organizations do not reflect the infrastructure of the organization. But every organization, every profession has to be looked at carefully and individually. You cannot over-generalize, and you cannot presume that one organization speaks any longer for the entire group. For example, fully one-third of the membership of the AFL-CIO vote the Republican ticket at Presidential elections.

Roger Kimball: If you take a look at all the journals coming out of academia, they are without exception on that side.

Edith Kurzweil: Presidents are elected by secret ballot, but when you have a meeting at the American Sociological Association, when it's done by a show of hands, you have a totally different story. I'd like to elaborate on your point, Celeste. You say that congressmen listen to the officers of professional organizations and are being influenced. What happens also is that earlier decisions again are being reinforced along the same lines. This is why it's important for the opposition to speak out too. But it's not doing so.

Jean Elshtain: Students are profoundly affected by their education and by the training they get. I read an interesting study of students who had pre- and post-graduate training in economics. Ultimately, after they got their Ph.D.s, they were more convinced than they had been when they started that the world was a place of totally self-interested, cutthroat competition, that people are nothing but maximizers of marginal utility. So in a sense they had internalized the world view of some of these models. It's similar in political science. Cynicism prevails. More and more students have become cynical about the possibilities of democracy itself. It finally comes down to power and how to grab one's share of it. The notion that people could make alliances with each other, could come together over shared purposes seems more and more elusive, impossibly

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romantic, to students. And that is troubling. The university ought not just to turn out specialists but to provide a civic forum, to educate people to be citizens. If we're losing the ability to do that on a college level, we are in serious trouble. How do you recapture that? Some of the civic lessons I got out in the provinces when I was growing up in Colorado now are seen as silly nonsense.

Digby Baltzell: Do they still believe those lessons in Colorado?

Jean Elshtain: I would like to think so. But to show a film like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, which I do from time to time when I get a chance to teach politics, makes students laugh. They think it's hysterically funny that a guy would be that idealistic and just naive. Of course he should have known that it all comes down to power plays. That's part of what we're dealing with. What ever happened to the notion of citizenship?

Abigail Thernstrom: Are you describing a widespread phenomenon? I think we don't know. I would add that question to Al Shanker's.

Jean Elshtain: There are modes of analysis. If a student isn't already cynical we talk about how the film is not so much about Washington, but about the possibility of what you might do in your own community, about whether being engaged by self-interest is objectionable. And then to bolster that fact by various modes of analysis, such as econometrics, is worrisome.

William Phillips: The last time I taught, which was a couple of years ago, my students were not cynical at all. If by cynicism you mean that they don't believe everything they're told, that they know there's a lot of crap going on in society, everybody believes that. That's not typical only of cynics. They were also interested in jobs and careers after they got out of school, as everybody is. But what I found, which is very different from what has been described, is that they shared, almost unconsciously, certain assumptions and certain ideas about society, and about America and Europe and the West that can come only from certain very simplified left-wing traditions. They would state things automatically about the nature of American society. They might even talk about imperialism, because that word has sunk into their heads. In other words, they are the recipients of a kind of culture that existed earlier in the country. They spout it out, but they're not cynical. They believe these things. They're concerned about poverty, about justice, although they have clichéd and knee-jerk opinions about it all, perhaps that's the way I

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should put it. Their opinions come from certain traditions. But again, I don't find them cynical.

Abigail Thernstrom: But recent polling data suggests that a majority of young voters are Republican.

William Phillips: That doesn't prove that they're cynical, does it?

Abigail Thernstrom: No, but it does prove that they're not programmed in the way you think.

William Phillips: Wait a minute. The polls are national polls. I don't know how many times we have to say this, there's a split in American life. The universities are not the population as a whole.

Abigail Thernstrom: I'm talking about the way young people think.

William Phillips: Well, which young people are we talking about? I'm talking about students. My students were not Republicans. There wasn't one Republican in my class.

Abigail Thernstrom: In the first place the students in those polls are not generally voters. If they think that way only in their college years and then graduate and think differently, then we have no problem.

William Phillips: Students are not representing the American population politically and culturally. It seems to me that's a fact.

Abigail Thernstrom: I'm just saying that if you take the youngest age cohort and look at their political profile, you see a picture very different from the one you're describing.

William Phillips: Look, Bush won the last election by an enormous landslide. But he couldn't win one in the university.

Abigail Thernstrom: Among the faculty.

William Phillips: Not among the students either.

Edith Kurzweil: I don't think we're going to solve that problem here. I'd like us to go back to what you brought up in the very, very beginning. The thing that I find very alarming on my campus and that's alarming on other campuses, polls or no polls, is the incredible polariza-

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tion. You have black students congregating together, not just black, but separated into Haitians, Nigerians, Cubans, and the this ones and the that ones. They're all separate. It is a replay of interest-group politics to the nth degree, and this makes for a great deal of non-civility, almost hatred in some ways. As some of you know, I went to City College, and there were clubs, all kinds of clubs. We primarily met for social reasons. The psychology club was a social club, so was the club of Jewish students, and the club of black students. We were not truly segregated. Now, when you go to the lunch room, students are segregated. And that is disturbing. If we want to think of all this in a larger sense, in the sense of civic education, then we must somehow break it up. I don't know how.

Roger Kimball: That's a very important issue. It's a separate issue, I believe, but this sort of retribalization of society is disturbing.

Digby Baltzell: But Edith, I observe no segregation or very little among Asians and Koreans. I know a Korean, whose father ran a grocery store in Harlem for thirty years, and her boyfriend's from one of the wealthiest families in Philadelphia. In the past, the universities brought kids together who had an intellectual commonality or at least an intellectual ability to get along with one another. Why should we be cultivating a whole group of Chicanos from Southern California at Penn? I think it's because of guilt.

William Phillips: It's white guilt, which Arthur mentions frequently in his book.

Edith Kurzweil: It seems to me that people who have no reason to feel guilty are getting guilty as they're being upwardly mobile.

Arthur Schlesinger: I hope we don't get so involved in higher education that we forget public schools. Public schools have been historically the great agencies that create the sense of a common culture in this society. They help convert newcomers into Americans. The heavy production industries, which once absorbed semi-skilled labor, are now off in Korea or elsewhere. So the public school's role is more critical than ever. It is being held responsible for everything. It used to be in part the role of the family, or the church, or the community to nurture the young. I think that the problems arise in the universities because of the failure of the public schools to educate students. Really, if we're going to be serious about this, we have to focus much more, it seems to me, on the public schools.

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Edith Kurzweil: I think we all agree on that. The question is, how to go about it? I think one of the problems we're faced with is that the public school teachers now have been brought up in universities that have lowered their expectations. Many of the teachers are simply not as knowledgeable as they ought to be in order to educate their students. I could give examples of teachers who were teaching third- and fourth-grade classes in Newark because they were role models. I remember two of them who could not construct a proper sentence. These particular ones have learned in the meantime. But I don't know whether we know just what is being taught in the public schools. What are the standards?

Al Shanker: If there's no agreed-upon curriculum, you can't know, because everyone's free. Most high school teachers in history and English have degrees in their subject matter. In math and science there's such a shortage that most of the people teaching those subjects are English or history teachers. However, the question of the quality of education is a function of the overall production of educated people within our society. If you produce three percent of your high school students who meet a world-class standard, and if that three percent goes to your elite institutions, and if you hire about twenty-three percent of all college graduates each year to go into teaching, you get the picture. Until you produce about the same percentage of high school students who meet those high standards as, let's say, France or Germany or Scandinavian countries, you're going to have questions of quality. You're not producing enough people who have the knowledge to teach.

Heather MacDonald: Isn't there a link, though, between what's happening in colleges and what's happening in high schools? So it's become a way of justifying what's happening in high schools. I think what is being discussed at colleges is providing the reasons for no longer emphasizing tests or de-emphasizing American history and for bringing in, instead, a smorgasbord of world cultures. Again, I think what's happening in colleges is setting a tone.

Al Shanker: The emphasis on world cultures is very recent.

Heather MacDonald: I'm responding more to Abigail Thernstrom's point.

Al Shanker: Look, I don't have to state my position in terms of the dangers of radical multiculturalism, but you can't blame the decline of standards on that. It is a more recent phenomenon. The National Assessment of Educational Progress started in 1968 or 1969. There's been

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virtually no change in achievement, except for black and Hispanic youngsters improving. Basically, only five or six percent of the kids graduating from high school could write a decent letter or essay in 1969, and it's still that way today. Every five or six years they give a test on history: it consists of very simple questions. Students are asked to place a number of historical figures and events within half a century. That was before we taught everything from fifteen points of view, from the point of view of every other continent, although we hadn't been doing a great job teaching American history or European history up to then, either. Until 1940 we graduated twenty percent of the kids in our high schools; eighty percent dropped out. We didn't have a term like "dropout" in 1940. In fact, a lot of people were concerned that we were educating too many. Even so, within a very short period of time it became public policy to try to reach all those who used to drop out and go into industrial and manufacturing jobs.

Harry Kahn: We also had the GI Bill of Rights after the war, which got a larger generation into college. That was a major change.

Al Shanker: The GI Bill also taught a lot of people, youngsters who were not viewed as good prospects for further education. They turned out to be the best generation of students. So we had a different view of potential and of capacities. Basically, there were two significant changes after the war. One was the theory that, in order to keep students in high school until they graduated, we had to lower standards so they wouldn't flunk out. We were the only country in the world to do that. The other change came during the sixties, when we questioned college admissions standards because we wondered whether we could measure, for instance, the difference between a grade of seventy-nine and eighty percent. We decided to let students come in and to give them special help, rather than hold them to standards. That was a good idea, but it didn't work.

Once higher education was expanded, the buildings were built, people were hired, there was no way you could hold students to standards, if it meant losing large numbers of them. One way to hold on to everybody in high school was to reduce standards, and the other was to advance people's progression into higher education. This was a perfectly good hypothesis, but it didn't work practically. If, as I think, ninety percent of the youngsters who go to colleges and universities in the United States are basically getting what in other countries would be their junior high school or high school education, then what ought to be the role of the university? One of the problems in the controversy around education is the failure to see that, to a large extent, American parents are

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paying for what youngsters should have gotten earlier. Turning this into an ideological education not only deprives them of what they would normally have but that which they were supposed to be getting before, which throws them into a totally different kind of world.

Abigail Thernstrom: I think that there is a general link between multiculturalism and the question of standards. If you begin to call racist the expectation that black students meet the standards Al Shanker was talking about, then you're arguing that you've got to have a racially sensitive curriculum which meets the very distinctive needs of those students. At that point, you're into multiculturalism, and your whole ability to talk about universal standards collapses. I think that argument carries a lot of weight in educational circles today.

Heather MacDonald: That's why I think what's being discussed at universities does matter, even if it's not affecting students' minds.

Abigail Thernstrom: The belief that it is racist to ask black students to know something about Thomas Jefferson is a problem.

Edith Kurzweil: I think we all agree on these points, so we don't have to belabor them any longer. But we want to discuss whether we can do something. What are the possibilities? I don't think that we can do anything very quickly. We must take into consideration the fact that we now have a very expanded university, with an enormous number of professors who have tenure and others who are up for tenure. We also have a vast number of high school teachers and elementary school teachers who need more education. I'm wondering if we could come up with some kind of policy that could help re-educate elementary and high school teachers. We need recognition by the public at large, and by the people in various levels of schools, that some kind of change is called for. If we could pressure faculty into realizing that drastic upward leveling is needed, we might eventually turn things around. I know NEH has some such programs in its summer institutes. Maybe such efforts could be expanded. This could be done, if everyone on every level were to know what's going on; if we were to face the fact that our schooling is inferior; and that this connects, also, to the fact that we have become a third-world country in terms of car production. I'm wondering whether there's a way one could explain matters along these lines, in a way that would not be threatening to educators, that would keep them from balking at changes.

Al Shanker: A few things are happening in this direction. Five years ago

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the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics began a series of meetings to see whether they could define what it is that students need to know to be able to do better in mathematics. They looked at what was being done in other countries. They put together a framework for a national curriculum: now states are adopting it, and textbook publishers are looking at it. For the first time, the issue is not being looked at by just a few textbook publishers but by a national group of people who understand mathematics. Now that they have done it, the pressure is on other groups to get together and define what it is that students are supposed to know and do. And they are beginning to meet. There is now a proposal before Congress to put together a national board, something like a standards board, just as you have in weights and measures. This board would certify appropriate content standards and standards for school achievement at various levels, not just whether kids are below average or above average, but what they should know. How many of them know it? And they would establish the appropriate measurements.

Now it's true that there is a lot of opposition to this, to the idea of common content standards and national assessments. On the other hand, we already have a group called the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. This board says that if you feel you're an outstanding teacher, you can sit for board certification, just as a doctor can become certified for surgery. You don't want to be just any teacher; you want to be a board-certified teacher. This board will start certifying two years from now. The board had to question what it is that teachers need to know. They're wrestling now with the fact that they can't just have process. They must question what works of literature, what levels of writing, what kinds of knowledge teachers need. I am optimistic that they're going to come up with evaluations and ideas that are worthwhile; and that lots of teachers will be eager to take this test. Ultimately, I think, they will drive teacher-training institutions. These will be evaluated by how well their future students do. These are positive things. People are starting to think about standards on a national basis, and are agreeing upon substance and content. That has never taken place before.

Edith Kurzweil: What will happen if these initiatives don't comply with affirmative action guidelines?

Al Shanker: Well, one of the big worries is over outcomes, how different groups will do. This issue was discussed for four or five months. There was another related issue: should there be only one standard? Obviously, if there is only one standard it is going to be set very low. Who is going to set a standard that the overwhelming majority will fail? You sort of have to have something that is outstanding, and something that is

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acceptable, and something that is unacceptable. You have to have a number of standards. Otherwise, it's all meaningless. Someone was saying that you can't put any assessment into place until all students have the same resources to meet the standards. All this is churning. But there is a movement to put these things into place. The answers are slowly being sorted out.

Harry Kahn: I wonder if any of the Democratic candidates have come forth with a position on this problem, or have indicated what they would do if elected?

Al Shanker: Paul Tsongas has said he'd like to experiment with vouchers. Tom Harkin has been for vouchers in the past, but he says that by taking care of Head Start and getting kids ready everything else will take care of itself. Bill Clinton is very involved in the standards issue. His wife, by the way, is one of the country's real experts on education. She not only has read all the stuff but also has traveled around the country and spoken to the best people in the field.

Harry Kahn: Would a strong position paper in a Democrat's platform be helpful?

Al Shanker: That will have nothing to do with the candidate.

Abigail Thernstrom: Is it fair to say that there really isn't much difference between Clinton and the other candidates on the education question?

Al Shanker: There's a very big difference, especially on private versus public schools.

Abigail Thernstrom: Okay, but what about questions of curriculum and standards?

Al Shanker: Those questions are related. Today, private schools are unregulated by government, and they're not going to be any more regulated if they get vouchers. In Detroit, for example, public schools wanted to have an all-black male school. The court said no. If vouchers are put into effect, there are already four or five private schools ready to implement an all-black student body.

Edith Kurzweil: I'm worried about the results of a voucher system. We seem to assume that all parents know what they're doing, that they're

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competent to assess schools. Certain parents do, and many parents don't. And what happens when they opt for a school that subsequently goes out of business? What happens to these schools? And to the children? We all wanted to integrate our schools, didn't we? And the effect of the proposed voucher system will be re-segregation. Inevitably, the result will be polarization, and as yet unforseeable problems.

Al Shanker: We've had a lot of all-black schools for a long, long time, and some of those were divided along sex lines. There's no evidence that during the period of segregation we produced outstanding students. Somebody's got to tell me what's going to be different about these proposed schools from the ones that existed in 1935.

Ronald Radosh: They claim they didn't have the funding or the equipment. They say that with full funding they'll be as good as any other schools.

Abigail Thernstrom: There were plenty of black role models in Jim Crow schools.

Jean Elshtain: At the moment, some feminists argue for all-female schools. There is a difference between segregation that is totally imposed by the outside and efforts to resegregate. I think we should look at what's prompting people to resegregate. I think it's a defensive maneuver because they think their kids aren't being taught well. Some if it is due to ideology. We've got to learn how to distinguish these situations.

Al Shanker: In some cases it's not ideological but threats of peer pressure. It doesn't have to be ideological, it just needs to be threatening.

Jean Elshtain: Part of what happens resulted from the fact that some black mothers didn't like busing but could not do anything about it. What's more, they no longer were active in parent/teacher organizations in their kids' schools. By having four kids in different schools, often all over town, they couldn't be actively involved. At the college level you've got to assume that kids are capable of managing without being totally tied into one particular group. Therefore, it's a pity when curriculum, faculty, and resources get directed towards what I call identity politics, totally confined by our race, gender, and so on.

William Phillips: Don't you think that the national ethos is involved? In France, for example, you didn't have to have committees to set up programs for the schools – we're not talking about universities at the

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moment – or set up standards for what should be taught, for improving teaching, and so on. It's assumed, in France, that if you go to school there are certain things you're supposed to learn. Now, I'm not convinced that the national ethos can be changed so easily by committees. I also want to emphasize a point that Heather made, and that is that what goes on in the universities under the cloak of multiculturalism is a general movement against learning about the past, learning American history and literature. Also, there is the general idea that there are no absolutes; that there is nothing you can learn because it's all relative. Of course we know that there are no absolutes, but not everything's relative either.

Al Shanker: I think that there's nothing wrong with being a little pessimistic. Yes, I agree that the more legitimacy this kind of multiculturalism is given on college campuses the more legitimacy it will gain in secondary schools. But back in the 1920s a lot of doctors who had gone to school and specialized in different fields went to state legislatures to argue that only those who had specialized in a certain area could practice in it. Other practitioners went to the legislatures and said they had the right to practice in all areas of medicine after they had their M.D.s. Because general practitioners were in the majority, specialists began creating their own boards – an internal system of identifying specialists. I suppose when they first did that in the 1930s, few people knew what a board-certified specialist was. But over a period of time, they educated their own people and the general public. Things were turned around. I think that by 1994 or 1995 we can create the institutional seeds and in a couple of decades can have very substantial impact.

William Phillips: You've been saying and Edith has been saying something I want to question. You're assuming that the quality of teaching has deteriorated. I'm not convinced. When I went to school, I think students learned more and were interested in learning and assumed they were supposed to learn. That was the purpose of going to school. There wasn't some other purpose. I don't think the teachers were any better. At the school I went to, the best teacher in the English Department was Miss Falk, who taught in the honors program. I went to her one day and said that I had a problem, that I would go to the library and see hundreds of books. How could I tell which were the good books? How would I know what to take out and what to read? She said to me, "It's very simple. All you have to do is take a book off the shelf, open it and read the first page. It will tell you whether it's a good book or not." Now that was an absolutely idiotic answer. I needn't belabor the point. If I could tell, I didn't need her advice.

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Digby Baltzell: All of my students want careers. But none of them want to be teachers anymore. In the past, women were precluded from being anything else. My best teachers, as I look back on my early days in school, were women. I think consumerism may go down, and we may get better people going into teaching.

Al Shanker: Two things. One is that most of the elementary school teachers even through the thirties were high school graduates who went to one- or two-year training schools, normal schools. By the thirties, high school teachers were the only ones who had a college degree. At that time, they were part of a very elite group. Five percent of the American public graduated from college in the 1930s, so they were part of the top five percent in the country. And because only twenty percent graduated from high school in the 1940s, elementary school teachers who had two years more than that were also part of the top six or seven percent. Now, teachers are among those coming from the top fifty percent. So you're dealing with different layers.

The second thing has to do with issues of curriculum. Then, people essentially went to training school. They knew that, in the fifth grade, for instance, they get these words, these stories, this part of American history, this part of geography. They knew they would be tested at the end of the year. And it was very much like learning to play the piano. You may play a little better or a little worse or with a little more feeling or a little less. But you're learning to play that piece. Today there is no piece to play. Today you have a blank canvas, and you're given the paints. You get a much different system of education when you're told that you have a piece to play, which you're specifically trained to do, and which you do over and over again. I'm not saying that's the greatest. But if that's too narrow and restrictive, then to have 2.7 million people individually figure out what should be taught and what way to do it is too open. The issue of quality isn't in and of itself the central one. These other issues have to be tackled.

William Phillips: Before we break up, could we return to what was the ostensible purpose of this meeting? Is there anything that we haven't discussed that we could do – we as more enlightened individuals than the norm in the universities?

Irving Louis Horowitz: William, one thing we ought to do is, instead of returning to the *ought,* to return to the *is*. If we are referring to education, it is not only public and private; it is also parochial and secular. There are different elements involved now, more profound, than simply public and private. Maybe parochial education did not dissolve. There

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are elements of it that continue to exist in the public domain. As to values in education, we may come to see the virtues of a one-track instead of a multi-track system. Andrew Greeley says that one of the virtues of Catholic education is that everyone who comes in knows that there will be a fundamental track, not two, three, or four. That is a kind of rudimentary democracy. Maybe we have to reconsider some of these earlier formulations. We have to look and see who makes decisions about education. You can't mandate from above. It is not Bill Clinton and it is not George Bush, it is parents. Education in America, historically, is not a federal government preserve. We must not get into the position where we think only in terms of mandates toward the educational apparatus. We have to look and see, it seems to me, why the private school systems have become so powerful. You take a city like New York and the relationship between black and white, public and private; it is not much of a secret where white middle-class people send their youngsters. This is not going to be altered by the next presidential election. Therefore, the voucher system is a very powerful force, because it is a wedge into opening up this problem.

The dilemma is, and you understand it best of all, to what degree can American society retain a hold on its population? To what degree are we going to have regionalism become a factor? To what degree are we going to have privatization in education? All of a sudden there is a large movement, involving hundreds of thousands of parents removing children entirely from the educational apparatus. To what degree can we afford to have an educational apparatus that violates a certain Jeffersonian ethos? I think it is not a matter of asking what we can do and then throwing up our hands. But we should examine what is being done, above all, in the existing tripartite system of private, public, and parochial. How does this differ from the 1940s? Again, at the risk of sounding Pollyanna-ish, when taking 1940 as the baseline year, remember that it was also a baseline year in terms of the number of people in higher education. We have had an extraordinary rate of exponential growth. We are one of the few nations that has made good on the promise of universal education. No European and no Japanese society has managed to do that. You can argue about quality, but you cannot gainsay the fact that America, between 1940 and 1990, has realized a certain democratic impulse. In 1940, the University of Texas had no black people; the University of North Carolina, the premier university of the South, may have had a handful. You did not have twelve or fourteen or fifteen percent of black people in higher education. So before we go completely overboard about what is wrong and what is to be done, let us recognize what has been done.

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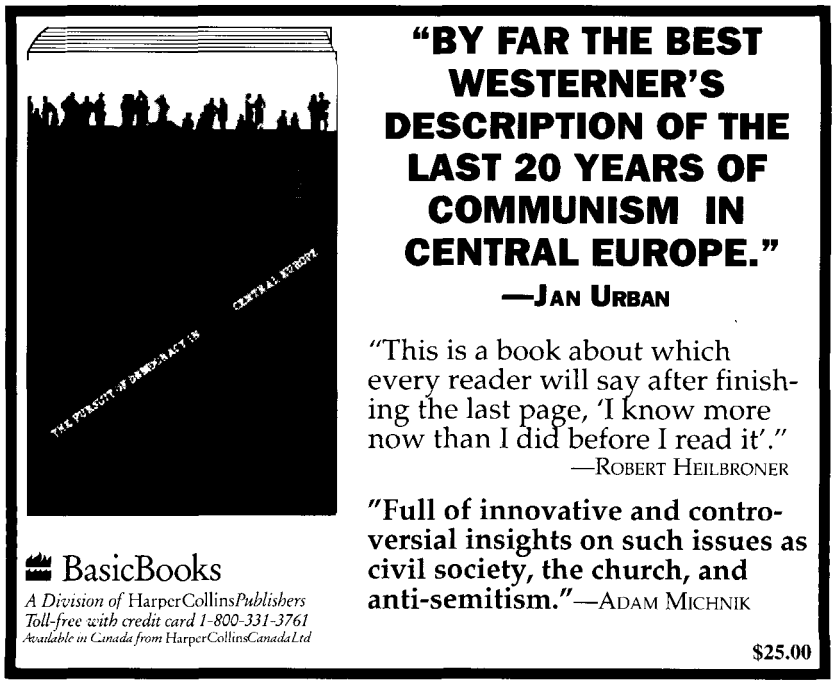
William Phillips: Yes, we've made the progress we all were fighting for. But this doesn't mean that we should close our eyes to the negative impact, to the unforeseen consequences we've come together to address. It is a continuation of this democratic impulse that is needed to preserve democracy.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EDITH KURZWEIL

Multiculturalism Abroad

In America the term *multiculturalism* has come to define the leftist, African-American agenda; elsewhere, it encompasses the problems of integrating ethnic and religious groups and sects that have legitimate claims on the same territory. And *diversity* is not postulated as it is by the "politically correct" as multiculturalism's rhetorical twin, but refers to the necessary process of learning to keep up an ongoing, peaceful dialogue with the "other" – based on mutual acceptance and, eventually, on respect. This is what I learned at the conference, "Meeting of Cultures and Clash of Cultures: Adult Education in Multicultural Societies," during the last week of April.

Upon arrival at Tantur, the Ecumenical Institute located on an imposing hilltop between Jerusalem and Bethlehem which hosted participants from Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, from Russia and Germany, from Serbia and Slovenia, the United States and Great Britain, its Czech-born American director, the Reverend Thomas Stransky, pointed to churches, mosques, and biblical sites in the peaceful countryside around us. We are facilitating dialogues among Christians, Muslims, and Jews, he said, but we refrain from talking about them for fear of reprisals by some of the more extremist Muslims against their fellow Arabs.

During an entire week, we would be propelled – intellectually and emotionally – from Buberian high ground into *realpolitik*, from moral education to immoral killings, while debating how best to defuse not only the Israeli-Arab conflict but also the overpowering tensions among majorities and minorities, nations and nationalities, in our post-communist world. As the "show and tell" about Israeli society was compared to the intractable conflicts elsewhere – at formal meetings, over dinner in the Arab village of Abu-Gosh and over coffee at the home of its patriarch, during visits to the Golan Heights and Jericho, to Brigham Young (Mormon) University and a kibbutz in the north – we learned that *our* theories and perceptions also are culture-bound.

"Tolerance cannot be institutionalized or imposed by one side,"

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stated the former president of the German Bundestag, Kai Uwe von Hassel, during the opening session, "but it can come about by fostering understanding not only among East and West Germans but among all nations . . . by promoting the study of languages . . . by helping young people to travel not as tourists alone but as participants in the culture of the countries they visit." What languages? How many of them can any individual possibly master? Does tourism necessarily engender toleration of minorities, of the "other," now was discussed by this assemblage of academics and politicians.

Kalman Yaron, who had organized the meeting under the auspices of the Martin Buber Institute of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, had hoped for this sort of exchange. He reminded us that Buber had insisted on the necessity of fully integrating Israeli Arabs as citizens in order to achieve a "non-utopian," rational society where Christians, Muslims, and Jews could tolerate one another and coexist. To achieve this end without falling into platitudes and United Nations rhetoric, we addressed political realities concretely and abstractly, shifting almost too easily from lofty hopes to grievous predicaments. We listened to Shlomo Avineri's exposé of nationalism as a post-imperial phenomenon which, at most, allows for islands of tolerance; to the diverging interpretations of the demise of the Yugoslav dream by Dimitrij Rupel, the foreign minister of Slovenia, and by Borivoj Samolovcev, a Serbian academic. We explored the possible means of legislating the inordinately complex issue of minority rights, and we were somewhat cheered by "the Belgian way of life," which accepts the "contrasting identity" of Flemish in relation to their Dutch neighbors and of Walloons to their French ones.

Yet we kept returning to the issues raised by Rivka Bar-Yosef of The Hebrew University in her opening talk, "The Israeli Case." She enumerated the intricate problems surrounding integration, their relations to Zionism and Jewish consciousness, the internal conflicts within these, and their roots in language – the Hebrew of the Bible, the Aramic of the Talmud, and the "new" Jewish languages of the Diaspora. Modern Hebrew was the means of absorbing immigrants, of facilitating the Israeli "melting pot" that was achieved via adult education, compulsory and free education of children, compulsory army service and housing policies. But it did not include non-Jewish citizens of Israel (about seventeen percent Arabs, Druze, Circassians and others). Nor did pluralism and multiculturalism, which guaranteed separate identities and customs (that is, for the eighteen major Christian sects and the Bedouins who remain nomads) make for harmony. Now, Bar-Yosef went on, Israeli Arabs are exposed to a double pressure of loyalty, "which increased with the opening of the West Bank, the peace with Egypt, the *de facto* frontiers

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with Jordan, the agreement of Saudia to allow small groups of pilgrims to Mecca." That most Arabs are Moslem (about ten percent of Israel's minorities are Christian Arabs), that the Druze have their own religion, that the former don't serve in the army while the latter do, makes for yet more intersecting conflicts. Although Arabic is the second official language, Hebrew dominates; although Israeli law recognizes separate religious jurisdictions, restrictions internal to the major and minor denominations of Arabs, Christians, and Jews tend to subvert these laws as well as the workability of the multiparty system. And the cross-cutting of personal and cultural values, of political interests, and of contradictory interpretations of history, has engendered stereotyping. Each group always can find yet another antecedent or "right" to prove its own claims – the wars of 1973, 1967, 1948, the Balfour Declaration, the Turkish rule, and, as a last resort, the Bible.

On the second morning we went to observe integration in action, at an "absorption center" in Ramot – an Israeli community of around forty thousand people that has taken in about five thousand Russian immigrants. We sat in on Hebrew classes taught by volunteers to people whose ages ranged from twenty to seventy. And because we knew that the Russians' collective votes might determine the direction of the next Israeli government, we wanted to know what party they were going to support. With humor and a great deal of zeal, four Russian women and three men, one of whom was a political candidate for the Knesset, defended support of the Likud, the Labor Party, and one or another of the new parties founded by their brethren. Others contended that, as newcomers, they ought to learn about democracy before voting at all. What could be more democratic than this discussion, we came away marvelling, and what a fantastic effort on the part of the Israelis who are "absorbing" highly trained individuals into menial occupations – "for the time being," as some of them asserted.

The ethno-political dilemmas are different in Russia, Galina Starovoitova, Boris Yeltsin's advisor on ethnic relations, reported. She relied heavily on Russian history as she informed us, for instance, that "with the breakup of the empire" there are twelve million Russians in Ukraine, five million Ukrainians in Russia; that *homo sovieticus* is not an invention of the Western media but a reality; that Russia has eighty-eight districts including thirty-one republics whose citizens have innumerable and different statuses; that some people are without statehood; and that, therefore, it was a miracle to have signed a federal treaty at all. History is present, Starovoitova stated emphatically. And just as emphatically, she asserted that minority rights will be respected and, therefore, at least two thirds of the Russian people will have to decide on these rights by referendum. Taking off her official hat, however, she wondered who will

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educate the educators, rewrite the books, provide the democratic structures, and so on, in post-communist Russia and its former satellites.

Joachim Knoll, of the University of Bochum, saw the location of minorities in terms of a pendulum that, throughout history, has swung back and forth between kindness and xenophobia. An integrated society, he stated, guarantees the preservation of language, religion, and culture; and it stops referring to immigrants as "foreigners," especially after they have been in the country for many years. Germany, he proved rather incontrovertibly, "slowly is developing from a national country to an immigration country" which, however, still needs to be integrated. In his talk, as well as in those of the other German participants, both shame for the past and determination to help avoid anything resembling another Holocaust – anywhere – could be detected, when one of the Germans warned against "hidden" anti-Semitism and fundamentalism and suggested that eliminating illiteracy and "assistance for self-assistance" to the third world would help alleviate inequalities, and when a number of others presented their thoughtful studies of contributions by Jewish emigré writers and intellectuals.

At 10 a.m. on April 30th, sirens initiated two minutes of silence to remember the victims of the Holocaust. When immediately afterwards we continued our discussion on Peace Education, I felt compelled to remind people that the existence of Israel is not just an academic question, that some Jews who had managed to escape Hitler were doomed because their ships were being barred from every port in the world: if Israel had existed in the 1930s, they might have been saved. I am certain I was influenced not only by the memory of my relatives who perished in Auschwitz, but by Peter Jarvis's excellent analysis of the "universal strangerhood" that dominates modern society and which needs an "outgroup" to confirm the "in-group's" inner reality and sense of belonging and identity.

Addressing national and religious components of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Meron Benvenisti enumerated its components. Religious differences, he said, can be incorporated in a sovereign state. But when nationalism is added, things get murky: to outsiders the clash appears to be over territory, but this is not clear to insiders, if only because collective identity and nationalism are distinct as well as mutually exclusionary. In Israel the dispute is not over borders or over colonialism; it is over the *patrimony* of the land and thus is endemic, organic. Therefore, concluded Benvenisti, this conflict cannot be resolved but must be managed. His Arab counterpart argued that the roots of the struggle were in the feelings for territory, and that these feelings had become stronger as the impact of the Islamic reform movement had grown, along with its increasing focus on religion rather than on nation. And he predicted that

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compromise will be less likely with the increase of fundamentalism.

Duncan Morrow of Northern Ireland noted that, in the end, what is national, religious, or secular can be lumped into otherness, into perceptions of who is in and who is out. In Ireland, he went on, the real problem is about the political rights of minorities, even though religion is what holds them together. He asked: How can we resolve what, in fact, can only be managed? What principles can transcend both nationalism and otherness? Daniel Murphy of the Irish Republic transposed this issue into the moral realm which, to me at least, seemed somewhat utopian. At another point, Murphy argued that because every political initiative aimed to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland has failed for the past twenty years, sectarian tension must be alleviated. To that end, he proposed that community values and attitudes be fostered in line with Buber's advice to nurture community spirit and the "I-We-ness" intrinsic to authentic mutuality.

The loftier the tone of the presentations, the closer they came to the discourses of the United Nations, the sharper the questions to the presenters became. Still, discussions of Buber's "passionate Zionism," which contrasted the policies of *Kleinzionismus* based on *realpolitik* rather than on the vision of his *Grosszionismus*, did engender genuine dialogue among conference participants. According to Kalman Yaron, Buber's vision of "co-existence without illusions" presently is being undermined by mutual denial of the other's national legitimacy – by the Palestinian Charter that officially lays claim on the entire land and demands the expulsion of the Jews as well as by the Likud government that denies the existence of the Palestinian identity. Palestinian violence and the "armed struggle" against the "Israeli occupier" reinforce Israel's "institutionalized terror" against Palestinians, and the irrational drive for vengeance. Recounting the dilemmas of being Arabs in a Jewish state, Yaron argued for coexistence, for *de facto* as well as *de jure* equal rights and opportunities. After a Palestinian entity has been created, he maintained, Israeli Arabs will be able to freely choose Israeli citizenship. Was Yaron's optimism fueled by what happened when, equipped with gas masks, he continued Arab-Israeli encounters in extremely dangerous conditions, and one of his Arab students said, "Regardless of our political outlook, we are in the same boat. We can either live together or die together. Let's live together." In fact, "no less than two hundred eight-seven organizations are engaged in creating the conditions for such Arab-Israeli coexistence."

While on our post-conference trip to the Golan Heights, as we were amazed and bowled over by the recent excavations of Bet-She'an, the city that goes back to the fifth millennium B. C., we heard about the Los Angeles riots. Tuned into the "postmodern" reports by our international

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media, the Israelis reacted to our massacres in the way we do to theirs – by superimposing their preoccupations on ours. They could not know that our racism is primarily based on economic inequality rather than nationhood, or that police brutality is part of a very different syndrome than Palestinian terrorism.

After the conference, I managed to interview Teddy Kollek, the legendary mayor of Jerusalem, to get his views on some of the issues discussed at the conference. To begin with, I wondered about the number of Arab-Israeli encounter groups.

TK: There are many, more than people think. People don't fully know about all we are doing for teachers' training, about the many Arab teachers coming to our universities.

EK: Do you consider Israeli hesitations about going to the West Bank justified?

TK: I'm very worried about going to Los Angeles or to New York. But I do go there.

EK: How valid do you think Arab claims are?

TK: When we came back to Jerusalem we found many houses destroyed. We didn't destroy a single mosque or a single church or a single monastery. This is the situation. The Arabs claim that because we were persecuted by the Germans and suffered in Europe, they should not have to pay the price for that. But there were hardly any Arabs in Palestine. The vast majority came because they were attracted by the labor conditions created by the influx of Jews. It is to no avail to go into all this history. We have to accept that there are Arabs here, and they have to accept that there is an Israeli state which will continue to exist and will get stronger. They should accept that they live under better circumstances than any other Arab group anywhere else. The fact is that there is more freedom of worship, more freedom of access to holy places, more freedom of expression, of teaching. They have a free press, which they never had. We're opening a large Arab library in Jerusalem, built out of money we raised, not from Arabs. All the rich Arabs haven't given us a penny. It will be the freest library in the Arab world. You couldn't have all these books in Egypt or in Syria. Each one of these countries excludes a large number of books published somewhere else. In Jerusalem, they can have all the books. There are four daily papers; they can write daily that Israel has no right to exist – as long as they don't incite anything.

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EK: Do they do much of that?

TK: A little here or there.They know that they can't do it so they don't. On the whole, their press is anti-Israel. This is their privilege. So they have advantages. They can travel to any country. They have the choice of remaining Jordanians, of not becoming Israelis. All over Europe, lines were drawn and you had to accept the citizenship you got. So, of course they are a minority. But, look, every conqueror did what he wanted. When the Romans came they destroyed the Temple When the Christians came, they turned all the mosques into churches; when the Muslims returned, they turned all the churches into mosques. We found fifty-eight synagogues destroyed when we returned to the Old City after the '67 war. But Israel broke with tradition. Desite its being our holiest place, we left the Temple Mount in their possession – until the Messiah will come and decide.

EK: When will that be?

TK: Who knows? Whenever he comes, he comes. But not everybody is happy. Some nationalists, a small minority, would like to build a temple again now. You have more Moslems praying on the Temple Mount now than you ever had in Jordanian times or any other time. I know people don't say this to the Arabs, I do. They want their own government, and Jerusalem as their capital. But why didn't they build it before? Why did they neglect Jerusalem to the terrible extent they did? Today they haven't got as much as I would like them to have. We should have done more. But we did a lot.

EK: I heard that one reason why they're against settlments in the territories has to do with water. Is that so? What do you think about the settlement policy?

TK: I think we shouldn't try to rule over a million plus Arabs. That is more to our detriment than anything else. That this is contributing to our security is a wrong concept. For example, in Lebanon, you had a Christian enclave until the twenties. Then the French came, and together with the Christians, they were fully convinced that they ould rule forever. They didn't. They became a minority, and you see the results today. I think to rule a million seven hundred thousand Arabs is fatal for the fate of Israel.

EK: So are you for giving back the West Bank?

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TK: Not the entire West Bank. We have to draw frontiers that are necessary for our security, but not an inch more. The promise of God to Abraham that is now being implemented by this government didn't come with a timetable. It could be in a thousand years. Now it is to our detriment and not to our advantage.

EK: Do you think that the government will change now that they've upped the one and a half percent necessary to elect a member of the Knesset?

TK: We'll see what happens. Basically, Israel is a country for the Jews, and I think whoever can come should come. If an individual doesn't want to come it's his decision. Everybody has to make up his own mind. I would hope that a great many more Jews will come. I think the Israeli government's policy of spending money on the West Bank instead of creating jobs for new immigrants is a serious mistake.

EK: I gather that the religious parties have a great deal of influence on this government.

TK: I don't think the religious parties are the ones who are pressing for settling the West Bank. They are not that active. There are some religious people who believe in this, but it's not the ultra-religious parties who are wishing for it.

EK: On a totally different level, I guess this is a compliment to you, I note that every time I get to Jerusalem, there seems to be something new that wasn't there before. This time I was on the promenade. That's a fantastic place from which to see Jerusalem, which now is the most spectacular city in the world, more so than Paris and London.

TK: It's become a very beautiful city. Tell people to come and see what we're doing.

EK: I will. Thank you.

May 5, 1992

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J. ANTHONY LUKAS

Troubled Ground: Blacks and Jews in Boston

Early in 1968, the John Hancock Insurance Company announced plans for a spectacular new Boston headquarters: sixty stories of shimmering glass, five thousand silvery windows, a giant mirror in which the Athens of America could read further confirmation of its storied charm and grace. Not the least of the project's allure was its prime location hard by Copley Square, one of the nation's great public spaces, fronted on three sides by the great granite facade of the Boston Public Library, the Romanesque splendors of Trinity Church, and the rococo elegance of the Copley Plaza Hotel.

Barely three months after these plans were made public, Martin Luther King was shot dead in Memphis, and Boston's black community erupted in a brief spasm of violence. By contrast with the convulsions in Washington, Chicago, and other northern cities, Boston's riots were mild: nobody killed, thirty-one wounded, thirty arrested, barely $50,000 in damages, most of it to white-owned stores in black Roxbury and north Dorchester.

Yet the rage unleashed by Dr. King's assassination proved enduring. Boston's small black community, hitherto known for its moderation and gentility, now made some unprecedented demands on white leadership. On April 8th, five thousand blacks, with whites specifically excluded, gathered in Roxbury's sports stadium and approved, by thundering voice vote, twenty-one demands for black control of their own community: all white-owned businesses in the black community to close immediately pending transfer of ownership to blacks; every school in the black community to have all black staffs; black control of all public and private agencies that affect lives of blacks; and an immediate no-strings-attached grant of $100 million to the black community. Before long, Mayor Kevin White was besieged by whites eager to go as far as possible toward meeting these demands. Corporate executives, few of them previously distinguished by their passion for racial or social justice, bombarded the mayor's office with schemes designed to assuage the restive black community. More eager than any was Robert Slater, president of the John

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Hancock Insurance company.

Slater was so impatient to get the Hancock out front in such efforts that mayoral aides dubbed him "the quivering mass of money." His private motivations were undoubtedly benevolent. Well before King's death, he had become Boston chairman of the Urban Coalition, a national group formed to enlist American business in the war on poverty. But skeptics could be pardoned for suspecting that the Hancock was not being entirely altruistic. For if its dazzling new headquarters was to border gracious Copley Square on the south, its eastern flank would turn all that glass toward the black community, scarcely a stone's throw away across the railroad tracks. Had the prospect of those five thousand windows, shimmering in the sky above the tenements of Columbus and Shawmut Avenues, held the Hancock hostage to black demands? Was the insurance company's progressive stance that spring, in part, a prudent policy of "riot insurance"?

At that point, though, the Hancock's interests coincided with Kevin White's. On May 13th, 1968, White proclaimed that Boston's banks and insurance companies would provide $50 million for low-income housing – through new construction, rehabilitation, and liberalized mortgages on existing homes. One of its leading promoters later characterized much of the mayor's program as a "wind puppy," an old Yankee term for a dog who looks pregnant but is actually bloated by gas. And indeed it was. Yet one part was very real indeed – the revival of a moribund five-year-old organization called the Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group (B-BURG, for short). Re-energized and re-funded that spring, B-BURG sprang into action, and soon mortgages, at the prevailing FHA rate of 6.75, were pouring into the inner city, virtually all of them to black families. The catch was that by explicit agreement, the banks would issue such loans only for homes in a very narrow swatch of southeast Boston, including portions of Dorchester and Mattapan – an area which had been overwhelmingly Jewish. (Adjacent Irish neighborhoods, where resistance to black migration was much fiercer, were carefully bypassed.) As banks funnelled blacks into this zone and unscrupulous real estate agents exploited the resulting panic, thousands of Jews, many of them elderly and frightened for their physical safety, fled into the western suburbs, notably Brookline and Newton.

In the early 1950s, more than 90,000 Jews had lived within a three square mile area, embracing Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. The start of black movement into this area, and the concomitant flow of upwardly mobile Jews into the suburbs, had begun to reduce those numbers well before King's death. Then, within barely two years, the rest of that storied community pulled up stakes and left. Today hardly a whisper of it remains within the city limits. Jews, of course, were scarcely

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the only victims of the B-BURG venture; plenty of blacks suffered as well. So eager were the banks and blockbusting brokers to get the loans out there and the properties turned over that they did little screening of either real estate or borrowers. Within two years, sixty-five percent of the houses sold under the program needed major repairs. Within five years, more than half of all the purchasers, unable to keep up their payments, lost their homes. Many of the houses stood vacant for years, refuges for drug addicts or the homeless, contributing to the relentless decay of these once vital neighborhoods.

This story, whose broad outlines have been known for some time, is told now in full compass and richly evocative detail by Hillel Levine, a professor of sociology and religion at Boston University, and Lawrence Harmon, editor of *The Massachusetts Brookline Citizen*. Their book, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions*, combines the rigor of good scholarship with the obsessive curiosity of good journalism, fused here by a controlled anger at the human costs of this unhappy episode. In it are some painful lessons for our time.

The first lesson implicit in this work is the scandalously haphazard fashion in which we Americans make public policy, even in a city said to be drenched with social science "expertise" and academic "excellence." Levine and Harmon make very clear that the revival of B-BURG in 1968 was part of a panic response to the King assassination and the black unrest it set off, a conclusion echoed by my own study of that time and place.

It is easy for us now to chuckle at Bob Slater's desperate efforts to curry favor in the black community and keep his glass tower intact. (The story is all the more ironic in light of the Hancock Tower's future. Within months of its completion, hundreds of those windows began tumbling streetward, a design flaw wreaking infinitely more havoc to that shimmering facade than black insurgents were ever likely to do.) But if the Hancock was acting in its own self-interest, so were many other Boston institutions and individuals. The dashikis, the shaved heads, the copies of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* brandished in the air, all that talk of a twentieth-century "slaves' revolt" or "day of reckoning" were taken quite literally by many Bostonians who at three o'clock in the morning envisioned black guerillas creeping up their porch steps. Public policy was shaped very quickly indeed to pump a lot of money into the black community so that whites could again sleep soundly.

Surely there was deep guilt about the conditions of black life in Boston, the growth of the Roxbury ghetto, the racism that continued to blight Massachusetts institutions from the notorious Boston public schools to the St. Patrick's Day Parade and Fenway Park. Surely, B-

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BURG was the product – as the author's subtitle says – of "good intentions." The fact remains that the scramble to get the loans issued, the money out there in the community, was a response to a crisis in public perceptions. It reminds me of the way my own city, New York, has responded of late to the daily dramas in its perpetual theater of calamity: the eruption of tuberculosis in prisons and hospitals; the multiplication of the homeless in our streets, subways, and public spaces; two black teenagers shot to death in a high school hallway, hours before the mayor was to pay a visit. To each successive headline, the city has responded in ad hoc fashion, as if no one had ever envisioned such events, as if no one had ever thought seriously about appropriate cures, much less prevention. As a "free society," we have justifiable suspicions of bureaucratic controls and government meddling in matters better left to the marketplace. But surely there is a better way than this to make public policy.

The second lesson we may draw from this terrible story is the decisive role of social class in determining who becomes the victim of such policies. We should not shy from some hard truths here: the Jews who got hurt worst in all of this were those without money, the lower middle class, the elderly, the infirm. For the most part, they were left to fend for themselves in 1969 and 1970, as racially-motivated violence fed off the social catastrophe of B-BURG. Some of the most eloquent, deeply felt pages in Levine's and Harmon's book describe the stance of the Jewish upper-middle-class communal institutions and organizations toward those left behind in the suddenly mean streets of south Dorchester and Mattapan.

By the late fifties, much of Jewish institutional life had already shifted to Brookline and Newton. Mishkan Tefila, the oldest Conservative synagogue in Massachusetts and the most influential Jewish religious institution in the Boston area, reared its neoclassical facade on Roxbury's Seaver Street, the very heart of the Jewish community. By then, half of its eight hundred member families, particularly the more affluent professionals, had moved to the suburbs. Convinced that the congregation's future lay to the west, its board – dominated by suburbanites – voted to purchase a twenty-three acre tract in Newton. The country's leading synagogue architect, Percival Goodman, was commissioned to design the building. A fundraising brochure promised, "In our new temple windows open on nature and the soul finds repose through a long vista of trees and sky. Here the child, while learning the book lesson, lifts his eyes to see the living fact of the Creator's design in every leaf and blade of grass or snow-clad knoll." The less affluent Jews who lived near the Seaver Street temple might have pointed out that it sat on the edge of Franklin Park, at that time still one of the nation's great urban parks, which also had plenty of trees and grass. But it was too late. In April of 1958, the

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suburban-dominated board voted to sell the Seaver Street building.

During the same period, Hebrew College and other important institutions decamped for the suburbs. More important still, the Boston branches of the principal Jewish communal organizations – the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, among others – now recognized that their principal constituencies and their prime fundraising territory lay in the suburbs. Increasingly, they turned a deaf ear to the anguished cries from Mattapan and Dorchester. When a coalition of inner-city Jews sought to file a class action suit challenging B-BURG, the combined weight of the area's Jewish establishment quashed the proposal. The young Rabbi Gerald Zelermyer, who hung on at Mattapan's Beth Hillel congregation, bitterly concluded in mid-1969, "The sad fact is that the community beyond has sounded a requiem for our area through almost wholesale indifference to our plight."

Not surprisingly, many embattled Jews in the area welcomed the Jewish Defense League when it waded into the crisis in late 1969. Meir Kahane's militant band had first come to national attention during the black-Jewish tensions of the 1968 public schools dispute in New York's Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Now the JDL's New England chapter, some one hundred-fifty members strong, patrolled Boston's Jewish neighborhoods armed with rifles and baseball bats. "We will not run from Mattapan," warned one of its pamphlets, "We are determined to fight to the finish these elements and enemies of our people. If need be, we will fight in hand-to-hand combat that our Jewish blood shall be avenged."

Kahane and his lieutenants have often been pictured as racists, lawless vigilantes, and headline-grabbing grandstanders. Though scarcely endorsing JDL tactics, Levine and Harmon provide a more sympathetic version of their activities, focusing on their "crude but largely accurate class analysis" of the abandonment of inner-city neighborhoods by the assimilationist Jews of suburbia. As the authors note, the class critique was largely ignored by Jewish communal organizations, which preferred to lecture the frightened Jews of the inner city about the need to avoid racial polarization and the virtues of integration. There is a striking parallel here with events in Boston seven years later, during the school desegregation crisis. Once again, some of Boston's working-class ethnic neighborhoods – this time, primarily Irish – perceived themselves as victims of social engineering on behalf of blacks. Once more, much of Boston's Irish-American establishment found itself lined up on the other side of the issue. *The Boston Globe*, long perceived as the newspaper of Boston's Irish, now spoke for the thoroughly assimilated Irish of suburbia in admonishing the mothers of Charlestown and South Boston to further the cause of social justice.

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As I researched my book about three families in Boston during the school desegregation crisis, *Common Ground,* I found a curious phenomenon among the Charlestown and South Boston families I came to know. They expressed little rage at their historic enemies, the fabled Yankees, generally perceived by then to be bystanders in the city's central dramas, looking on from sinecures in banks, insurance companies, and educational television stations. And while surely these inner-city Irish families did not care much for blacks, indeed often held them in fine contempt, I rarely heard much about black failings. It was as though everyone "knew" that; it was hardly worth talking about. What I heard a great deal about, though, was the moral bankruptcy of the "four-toilet Irish" – those who made it to the suburbs, to the corporate suites, the State House and Congress, and, God forbid, the White House – who had forgotten the Irish they left behind. The real venom I detected was reserved for those Irish-Catholic "traitors," their "own kind," who deserted the old neighborhood, the old church, the old tavern, the old pieties for the comforts – and immunities – of the suburbs. This primal rage was directed at various times against W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., the federal judge who had handed down the school desegregation order; Senator Edward Kennedy, who had a hand in Garrity's elevation to the bench and was one of his most consistent supporters; Speaker of the House Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neil; to some extent Mayor White; and much of the senior clergy under the Portuguese Cardinal Humberto Medeiros.

If one aspect of the school desegregation battles of the 1970s was a struggle between the Irish who had made it and the Irish who got left behind, so one aspect of the B-BURG tragedy was a struggle between the assimilationist Jews of the suburbs and the Jews who got left behind. In both cases, the burden of working out the great issue of equality in American life was placed on those least able to bear it, while those with the greatest resources – psychological, educational, and financial – were almost entirely exempt. In each case, the poor were pitted against the poor, with both sides losers. That does not mean for a moment that the desegregation of Boston's schools and neighborhoods was not long overdue. There can be no question that the Boston School Committee had unconstitutionally segregated the city's schools, leaving Arthur Garrity no alternative but to undo its dirty work. Moreover, much of the problem was rooted in Boston's fabled neighborhoods, so ethnically homogeneous, so impermeable to minorities. Yet the desegregation of both schools and housing produced unintended consequences.

The shortcomings of Boston's schools are now well known. Many whites have fled into parochial and private schools and the suburbs, but that is not the worst of it. If the schools had been nominally desegre-

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gated by race, they have now been resegregated by class. The best-prepared and most resourceful families, white, black, Hispanic, and Oriental, have fled the public system, leaving it with the least prepared and most vulnerable students of all races. And if B-BURG began by desegregating the housing stock of Mattapan and South Dorchester, its long-range result has been to resegregate the area by both race and class. The once-vibrant Jewish neighborhoods have been decimated, replaced by new emigrants who have yet to build workable communities there.

This brings us to the third lesson of the B-BURG story. Equality is a value worth fighting to preserve and enhance. But community is a countervailing value that makers of public policy ignore at their peril. This is a tension as old as the nation itself: the notion of community invoked by John Winthrop when he set out to found "a city upon a hill" in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the idea of equality as a natural right of all mankind, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. The battle was rejoined a century later in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, in which Lincoln argued that the essence of democratic government was "the equality of all men" derived from natural law, while Douglas insisted it was "the principle of popular sovereignty," the right of American communities to decide fundamental issues like slavery for themselves.

In recent years, Boston and other American cities have had to grapple over and over with these competing values. These have been hard choices: between racial justice and community control, between equality of educational opportunity and neighborhood schools, between a black family's right to decent housing at a price it can afford and a Jewish family's right to live out their lives in the community of their fathers. What makes this struggle rise to the level of genuine tragedy is precisely that these are not choices between right and wrong, but between competing values: between right and right. In Dorchester and Mattapan following Martin Luther King's death, good intentions and a sense of urgency born in panic produced bad social policy, damaging to Jews and blacks alike. If we learn anything from this cautionary tale, we should beware of deceptively easy solutions to the tangled afflictions of our sorrowful cities.

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MORRIS DICKSTEIN

Farewell to the Gilded Age

In the first half of the twentieth century, criticism in the English-speaking world went through a momentous transformation. "When I did most of my work," wrote Paul Elmer More, "there was almost a critical vacuum in this country and in England. . . . It was something of an achievement – I say it unblushingly – just to keep going in such a desert." His longtime antagonist H. L. Mencken said much the same thing. "When I began to practice as a critic, in 1908 . . . it was a time of almost inconceivable complacency and conformity."

This situation would change dramatically with the development of modernism. In a 1949 lecture, "The Responsibilities of the Critic," F. O. Matthiessen described how Eliot and other modern writers, in the face of their wrenching experiences during the First World War, had set out "to use a language that compelled the reader to slow down," a more difficult, more densely physical, more disjunctive language that also demanded a different kind of reading. I. A. Richards called it "practical criticism" in his famous book of the 1920s that had an especially strong impact on American critics. "What resulted from the joint influence of Eliot and Richards," noted Matthiessen, "was a criticism that aimed to give the closest possible attention to the text at hand, to both the structure and texture of the language."

But even before World War One, and long before the triumph of modernism, America's cultural complacency was shaken by an earlier "new criticism" with much stronger roots in the critical tradition of the nineteenth century, which had decayed by 1900 into a fussy New England moralism. Writers like Mencken, Van Wyck Brooks, Joel Spingarn, and Randolph Bourne, although they spoke for a rebellious younger generation, still belonged to the tradition of the public critic. Unlike later critics attached to universities, their work was essayistic rather than

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academic, conversational rather than technical, historically oriented yet strongly contemporary in its concerns, accessible to any intelligent reader. If the prevailing criticism influenced by Eliot was interpretive and analytic, these public critics, like their great Victorian predecessors, emphasized the social, moral, and historical. Their criticism was directed against the materialism and philistinism of American culture in the Gilded Age, the complacency and conformity of the genteel tradition.

Joel Spingarn (in his once-famous lecture, "The New Criticism") and Randolph Bourne (in essays like "The History of a Literary Radical) represented two versions of the young radical intellectual of 1910. Though Spingarn attacked literary scholarship, he himself was a superb scholar of Renaissance criticism. Though he appeared to renounce politics and society for aesthetics, he was a founder and for three decades a leading figure in the NAACP. Bourne, who seemed during World War One to leave literature behind for political controversy, was the kind of cultural radical who brought aesthetic concerns into politics itself. Progressivism, notes Christopher Lasch, "was for the most part a purely political movement, whereas the new radicals were more interested in the reform of education, culture, and sexual relations than they were in political issues in the strict sense." Bourne was the forerunner of the adversary intellectual alienated from the temper and values of American culture, determined to put it on a wholly new footing.

Neither Spingarn nor Bourne made their mark strictly as critics; neither pursued much extended commentary on contemporary writers. For members of this generation, the line between literary criticism and social or cultural criticism was very hard to draw. They saw writers and artists as exemplary figures: allies or enemies in their struggle for cultural renewal. representing either the wave of the future or the dead hand of the past.

The two men who eventually had much greater impact as socially-oriented critics were Mencken and Van Wyck Brooks, Mencken as editor of *The Smart Set* from 1914 to 1923 and the more widely read *American Mercury* from 1924 to 1933, Brooks for a decade after the publication of *America's Coming-of-Age* in 1915, perhaps the single most influential diatribe against the culture of the Gilded Age. The following year in one of a series of essays in *The Seven Arts*, Brooks sounded the keynote of a generation and an entire era: "How does it happen that we, whose minds are gradually opening to so many living influences of the past, feel as it were the chill of the grave as we look back over the spiritual history of the last fifty years?"

Everything about this passage is typical of the early Brooks: the doleful prophetic note sounded more in sorrow than in anger; the sinu-

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ous poetic flow of the sentence itself, appraising an entire culture in a single interrogative nod; the emphasis on spiritual history rather than material life since he, far from rejecting the past, insists on its quickening influence – the "usable past" that he would spend his life trying to recover. *America's Coming-of-Age* is best known for its attack on the opposition between highbrow and lowbrow in America, but where these terms have come down to us as aspects of an entertainment culture, a putative hierarchy within the arts, for Brooks they stood for a grievous split in the American mind, in the culture as a whole. Though Brooks lends one the name of Jonathan Edwards (and calls it Puritan) and gives the other the name of Benjamin Franklin (and calls it practical), his real subject is the business civilization of post-Civil War America, with its division between a brash entrepreneurial culture resourcefully bent on acquisition and a rarefied intellectual culture devolved from puritanism and transcendentalism to a thin-blooded gentility.

Brooks took his main argument and even some of his examples from George Santayana's seminal 1911 lecture, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy." (Other notable sources include Carlyle's exhortations to Emerson to be less abstract and more worldly; Henry James's 1879 study of Hawthorne, with its stress on the thinness of American life; and Matthew Arnold's contrast between the practical, activist spirit he calls Hebraism and the more reflective, aesthetic mode he labels Hellenism.) In his lecture Santayana found America "a country with two mentalities, one a survival of the beliefs and standards of the fathers, the other an expression of the instincts, practice, and discoveries of the younger generations." He suggested that "one half of the American mind, that not intensely occupied in practical affairs . . . has floated gently in the backwater, while, alongside, in invention and industry and social organization, the other half of the mind was leaping down a sort of Niagara Rapids." While the American mind looked back toward Europe and to the secular remnants of its own Calvinist past, American energy was hurtling forward into the modern world.

As Brooks develops this argument, he comes close to the spirit of Max Weber's and R. H. Tawney's work on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. (Weber, of course, also uses Benjamin Franklin as his prime exhibit.) Brooks writes that "the immense, vague cloud-canopy of idealism which hung over the American people during the nineteenth century was never permitted, in fact, to interfere with the practical conduct of life." But it's not enough for him to invoke the split between culture and society, mind and practical life. To him, as to any nineteenth-century historicist, a great writer is not simply an individual but a crystallization of his time and place. Brooks is concerned, for example, with the relation between Emersonian individualism and America's eco-

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nomic individualism. For him, Emerson's thought reflected the spirit of the pioneers. It went back to a period of genuine mobility in American life: "It corresponded to a real freedom of movement and opportunity; pioneers, inventors, men of business, engineers, seekers of adventure found themselves expressed and justified in it."

Though Emerson himself eventually traveled West on the new transcontinental railroad, to Brooks he presides over this new world like a rarefied spirit, hovering above it but scarcely part of it. Here Brooks follows Santayana, who had found "a certain starved and abstract quality" in Poe and Hawthorne as well as Emerson. ("Life offered them very little digestible material," said Santayana, "nor were they naturally voracious. They were fastidious, and under the circumstances they were starved.") Brooks too insists on the abstractness of Poe and Hawthorne, which flies in the face of Hawthorne's abundant historical detail and Poe's richly embroidered Gothic fantasies. Brooks may also have been influenced by John Jay Chapman's brilliant account of the "anaemic incompleteness of Emerson's character," with its astonishing peroration: "If an inhabitant of another planet should visit the earth, he would receive, on the whole, a truer notion of human life by attending an Italian opera than he would by reading Emerson's volumes. He would learn from the Italian opera that there were two sexes; and this, after all, is probably the fact with which the education of such a stranger ought to begin."

Brooks himself was a man whose inhibitions, grounded in his own genteel upbringing, drove him to identify with Emerson as well as to criticize him. (According to Brooks, a typical American grows up "in a sort of orgy of lofty examples, moralized poems, national anthems, and baccalaureate sermons; until he is charged with all manner of ideal purities, ideal honorabilities, ideal femininities.") Chapman, a severe, idiosyncratic moralist as well as a cultural critic of great distinction, thought Emerson dangerous reading for the impressionable young, for "his philosophy, which finds no room for the emotions, is a faithful exponent of his own and of the New England temperament, which distrusts and dreads the emotions. Regarded as a sole guide to life for a young person of strong conscience and undeveloped affections, his works might conceivably be even harmful because of their unexampled power of purely intellectual stimulation." Like Brooks's treatment, this attack is also a rare tribute, and undoubtedly an autobiographical one.

Edmund Wilson, a literary heir to both Chapman and Brooks, wrote a striking study of Chapman's personality in *The Triple Thinkers* as well as several shrewdly balanced reviews of Brooks's later work. Brooks himself was subject to recurring bouts of depression, which no doubt impelled him towards the psychological approach of one of his best books, *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1921). But the position of the alien-

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ated outsider critical of American culture, which finds its fullest expression in his treatment of Twain, was personally difficult for him to sustain. It led to a nervous breakdown later in the 1920s, which kept him from working for five years – significantly, just as he was completing a biography of Emerson.

As he recovered, Brooks abandoned criticism and social prophecy for a more anecdotal kind of literary history – a "pageant of genius," he later called it. His biography of Emerson turned lyrical. He celebrated much about American life that he had once denounced and, in his best-selling *Makers and Finders* series (1936-1952), wove a richly detailed tapestry of the usable past he had once been so hard pressed to discover. By the early forties, he was attacking Eliot and other modern writers and critics in vituperative terms as "coterie-writers," as if only the past had produced any literature of value. As Wilson drily noted, for Brooks the "modern" writers were still the writers of the Wells and Shaw generation who had excited him before the war. The man who had once looked to Europe as a standard now became an uncritical promoter of American literary nationalism. The aging young turk wrapped himself in the Great Tradition. "A homeless generation has obvious needs," he wrote in a 1934 preface to his earlier work. "It needs to be repatriated. It needs to find a home."

Like the Marxist critic Georg Lukács, Brooks criticized his early books without entirely renouncing them. In his later preface he attributed their pessimism to the Oedipal vivacities of youth. Puritanism, he says with some justice, "has ceased to menace any sentient being; and, properly apprehended, it stands for a certain intensity that every writer values." The bold new scholarship of Perry Miller was just over the horizon, and the rebel causes of 1915 seemed remote. In *America's Coming-of-Age*, Brooks had followed Santayana in finding this special intensity in Whitman. In Emerson he then saw only the vaporous idealism of someone "imperfectly interested in human life." Looking for a writer more grossly embodied, a writer with more *mud* on him, he settled on Whitman, who, though "saturated with Emersonianism . . . came up from the other side with everything New England did not possess: quantities of rude feeling and a faculty of gathering humane experience almost as great as that of the hero of the *Odyssey*. . . . He challenged the abnormal dignity of American letters. . . . Whitman – how else can I express it – precipitated the American character."

Can any writer ever really do this much, or even represent this much? Brooks's early books, beautifully written, remain of permanent interest, yet it's hard to escape the impression that he is using a method inherited from Matthew Arnold to work out his own inner conflicts, Arnold's

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"dialogue of the mind with itself." Like Arnold, he turns writers into cultural emblems, projecting the divisions of his sensibility into an historical dialectic. He was no practical critic; he never got close to writers in the intense formal way the New Critics would teach everyone to do. Despite his fame and influence, his name goes unmentioned in W. K. Wimsatt's and Cleanth Brooks's hefty history, *Literary Criticism* (1957). At the end of his essay, "On Creating a Usable Past," Brooks writes, rather lamely, that "the real task for the American literary historian . . . is not to seek for masterpieces – the few masterpieces are all too obvious – but for tendencies." Even more than Arnold, he turned criticism into a form of cultural diagnosis, an examination of the national mind.

H. L. Mencken was older than Brooks, but his heyday came afterward, when the young men of the twenties devoured *The American Mercury* and lived by his cynicism, wit, and satirical gusto. Mencken was protean, he was a force of nature. He learned to write not among pale Harvard aesthetes like Brooks but in the hurly-burly of Baltimore journalism and at smoke-filled national conventions. If Brooks's weakness was a poetic vagueness, as if he were sometimes mesmerized by the soulful flow of his own voice, Mencken's writing was almost too clear and sharp. Like all great caricaturists, he sacrificed nuance for vivid exaggeration. He could be blunderingly unsubtle, elephantine, ponderously Germanic. But like his master, Shaw, Mencken was never vague, never in doubt. In a perfectly Shaw-like put-down of the man he calls "The Ulster Polonius," Mencken writes that much as he enjoys reading Shaw's works, "so far as I know, I never found a single original idea in them." No, he says, Shaw is an immensely entertaining set of rhetorical tricks. Shaw is "quick-witted, bold, limber-tongued, persuasive, humorous, iconoclastic, ingratiating. . . . It is his life work to announce the obvious in terms of the scandalous."

In other words, Shaw, like Mencken himself, is a style: a dazzling high-wire act, an endlessly resourceful iconoclasm: "He has a large and extremely uncommon capacity for provocative utterance; he knows how to get a touch of bellicosity into the most banal of doctrines; he is forever on tiptoe, forever challenging, forever *sforzando*. His matter may be from the public store, even the public junk-shop, but his manner is always his own. The tune is old, but the words are new."

Mencken was not primarily a critic, although he wrote a great deal of criticism between 1910 and 1920. But as these scintillating lines on Shaw demonstrate, Mencken wrote about books with exactly the same kind of sweeping brush strokes he used to attack politics, morals, and manners. His portrayal of Shaw, supposedly the most intellectual of

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writers, is simply a piece of Shavian paradox: just the way Shaw might have eviscerated anyone who dared influence *him*. Mencken's style is his rhythm; he repeats himself, courses his theme through endless variations but he is never boring. As a satirist he relishes strut and pretension, adores folly and stupidity on a grand scale. No one would say he is "fair" to his subjects, but outsized characters like William Jennings Bryan, Anthony Comstock, or Henry Cabot Lodge give him the material for vivid cartoons as no literary subject could. Unlike merely bad writers, these men cut a figure in the world. They unwittingly synthesized the prejudices and pomposities of others, conveying a great deal about the mood of the moment.

Despite this turn toward social satire, Mencken did his work as a critic. He took up the causes initiated in Howells's and Norris's campaign for realism by tirelessly promoting the work of Dreiser and Conrad. He shared his friend Huneker's cosmopolitan taste and loved to lampoon American provinciality. He was a working editor as well as the key advisor to Knopf, one of several new publishing houses that began to bring out modern European writers along with young, unconventional Americans. As Edmund Wilson wrote long afterward, "The publication of Mencken's *Book of Prefaces* in 1917, with its remarkable essay on Dreiser and its assault on 'Puritanism as a Literary Force,' was a cardinal event for the new American literature." As late as 1950 Wilson would pay tribute to Mencken's old battle against "the genteel-academic culture that had done so much to discourage original American writing from about 1880 on," adding, "he was without question, since Poe, our greatest practicing literary journalist."

Yet Mencken's essay on Dreiser is more vivid on Dreiser's faults, such as his style, than on his virtues. He offers up a small anthology of Dreiser's sins with the note that "every reader . . . must cherish astounding specimens." Dreiser's worst novel, *The 'Genius'*, sends him building towards a Homeric riff: "There are passages in it so clumsy, so inept, so irritating that they seem almost unbelievable; nothing worse is to be found in the newspapers." The book's structure fares no better: it "is as gross and shapeless as Brunnhilde. It billows and bulges out like a cloud of smoke, and its internal organization is almost as vague. . . . The thing rambles, staggers, trips, heaves, pitches, struggles, totters, wavers, halts, turns aside, trembles on the edge of collapse." But Dreiser is not to be dismissed. Mencken, a great stylist himself, never mistakes style for greatness. Keeping his balance, he criticizes Dreiser's vision of the world but without confusing the philosophy with the fiction.

Along with Brooks and Wilson, Mencken was one of our last true men of letters. He takes us back to a world where newspapermen could

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be more literate than most academics and could write far more intelligently about American literature and the American language. He loved baiting professors, especially heavy-handed moralists like the New Humanists, and in a piece called "Criticism of Criticism of Criticism" he praised Spingarn's demolition of all the usual academic ways of pigeonholing writers, especially troublesome and innovative writers. He attacks most critics for "their chronic inability to understand all that is most personal and original and hence most forceful and significant in the emerging literature of the country." "As practiced by all such learned and diligent but essentially ignorant and unimaginative men, criticism is little more than a branch of homiletics." If the writer is "what is called a 'right thinker,' if he devotes himself to advocating the transient platitudes in a sonorous manner, then he is worthy of respect."

Warming to his theme, Mencken writes that "we are, in fact, a nation of evangelists; every third American devotes himself to improving and lifting up his fellow citizens, usually by force; the messianic delusion is our national disease." Mencken, of course, cannot resist intensifying, exaggerating; settled into his pulpit, caught up in the swell of his surging prose, he exemplifies the very evangelism he loves to pillory. Moreover, although he detests moralism, he cannot accept a purely aesthetic attitude: "Beauty as we know it in this world is by no means the apparition *in vacuo* that Dr. Spingarn seems to see. It has its social, its political, even its moral implications. . . . To denounce moralizing out of hand is to pronounce a moral judgment."

We remember Mencken the entertainer rather than Mencken the critic. He had a plain bluff way with books, as with everything he wrote about, but his mind was never so simple or so eager for effect that it left no room for qualification. The offensive but fairly routine racism and anti-Semitism of his post-1930 diaries were contradicted by his actual behavior towards blacks and Jews, including his strong patronage of young black writers. But the serious issues of the Depression plowed Mencken under, made him seem cranky and irresponsible, and he subsided gracefully into autobiography, like Edmund Wilson in his final years. As a critic he had no role to play in the Age of Eliot, when terms like "beauty" and "sincerity" lost their meaning, and modern literature became Hemingway, Joyce, and Proust rather than Ibsen, Shaw, and Wells. The struggle against Victorianism was over; the battle for modernism had hardly begun.

As Americans became less provincial, more cosmopolitan, Mencken lost his subject. He has had some imitators but no successors. Perhaps the many-sided work of Dwight Macdonald came closest. He too was a sharp critic of language, a witty and destructive polemicist, a brave editor, a political gadfly, and a ruthless but entertaining mocker of cultural

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sham and pomposity. But he was more purely the intellectual, a nemesis of middlebrows and a critic of ideology, in a style that originated with the thirties generation. Like Mencken, he could be obtuse and unsubtle; he could simplify for effect. But he lacked Mencken's wider interest in the whole American gallery of rogues and fools.

The New Critics hated Mencken for his mockery of the South and his refusal to take literature with their kind of gravity, as a special, complex realm of aesthetic discourse. The radical intellectuals of the thirties, scarcely notable for their sense of humor, followed the model of Brooks and Bourne and the cultural radicals of *The Masses,* not the example of Mencken. Macdonald wrote perhaps the sharpest attack on Brooks for his defection from the highbrow camp. The *Partisan Review* critics were as remote from the cynical *Front Page* world of daily journalism as any of the professors.

When Brooks in the thirties overcame his own alienation and began writing his pageants of American life, the younger critics angrily parted company with him. Looking back at Brooks's career in 1954, Lionel Trilling lamented the "abdication of his leadership of the modern movement." Of his later work in cultural history, Trilling noted that "ideas and the conflict of ideas play little or no part in it." Among serious critics, only Edmund Wilson continued to defend the elder Brooks. As if to highlight his own somewhat old-fashioned allegiance to social history, Wilson included no less than three reviews of his friend's *Makers and Finders* volumes in his 1950 collection *Classics and Commercials*, pieces more sympathetic to Brooks than his earlier harsh dissection of *The Pilgrimage of Henry James*. Although Wilson continued to emphasize Brooks's shortcomings as a practical critic, he was most impressed by the quality of the writing, by the intricately patterned mosaic of major and minor figures, and by the keen sense of time and place that enabled Brooks to locate American literature so firmly in the American landscape.

Brooks' own purpose, as he tells us in his 1953 envoi, *The Writer in America*, was "to show the interaction of American letters and life." This was a goal Wilson admired without sharing Brooks's nationalism and antimodernism. Like every other cultural critic descended from Matthew Arnold, Brooks and Wilson would have agreed with F. R. Leavis that "one cannot seriously be interested in literature and remain purely literary in interests."

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EDA KRISEOVÁ

Dear Mr. President

Dear Mr. President,

You must be wondering whom this letter is from, Chief Constable Bláha began timidly. He was writing to the head of the state in which he had lived for the past seventy-two years. Immediately dissatisfied, he crumpled up the paper, tossed it into the wastepaper basket, and rolled another sheet into his old Underwood:

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to you as one soldier to another, but even as he typed he knew it was wrong. He stood up, shamefacedly scratching the stiff military crewcut that had covered his head since before he could remember. But he was so upset that he went back to the typewriter and started in for the third time:

Dear Comrade President,

I am a chief constable, retired, and my name is Cestmír Bláha. I would like to tell you about the calling to which I have devoted my life. I have always been a faithful servant of our workers' and peasants' state, yet now that I am getting on in years it has turned against me.

Having written out his complaint, Mr. Bláha fell to musing. He didn't like the word *state.* State? he asked himself. Which state? It suddenly occurred to him he had served every form of state the world has known - and without so much as crossing the borders of the country he was born in. He had never taken part in a coup; the regimes had come and gone against his will, and he defended them all as passionately as he would have defended the mother who nursed him. But the governments fell and left him orphaned, and what saddened Mr. Bláha most of all was that none of them, none of the governments he served, had ever been recognized as meritorious and just.

Now Chief Constable Bláha - he was just. He typed a thick layer of x's over the word *state* and wrote in the word *nation.* When you're a constable, your mind never stops, and it had fortunately occurred to him in time that no state, no government cares to hear that there was or will be any state or government but itself.

I was always true to my oath, namely, 'to serve faithfully, without regard to race, nationality, or political conviction.' I never sullied my honor and always stood up for the poor and downtrodden (the rich didn't need me, so I

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didn't serve them). And now I am forced to stand up for myself . . .

A cat leaped into the room, landing with a slight bounce, like a balloon, on all fours. It brushed against the constable's leg and gave a contented purr. Mr. Bláha took his hand off the keyboard and placed it between the cat's ears.

"An old man needs a pet," he said to himself. He couldn't live without one. You put a nose like the one on this cat here - you put a nose like that on a cop, and nobody could beat him. Animals have it all over people; people are the lowest of all animals.

Mr. Bláha stood, brushed the eraser bits off his trousers, and poured out some milk in a saucer. The cat started licking at once, its tiny pink tongue flicking in and out. Mr. Bláha looked on lovingly. Then he turned and put on his round office glasses, twisting the wires firmly behind his ears.

. . . because there is no one to stand up for me. I always followed orders and made certain others did likewise. I never made trouble for anyone.

We were all in it together. They had their instructions; I had mine. No point in making trouble, the constable had always thought. But what I never understood was why I had to suffer for every new order, new regime, new system.

The problem is my pension and the sale of my house in K. I have written to all the agencies involved - the Municipal National Committee, the District National Committee, the Presidium, the District Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Regional Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Most of them failed to respond, and the ones that did respond told me they would look into the matter. Nothing has ever come of it.

I realize you have more pressing affairs of state, both national and international, but I turn to you as there is no institution to which I have not turned.

The chief constable was well equipped: he had a file on the windowsill, its stiff black boards crammed with documents recording every transaction he had made in connection with his person or his family throughout his life and arranged with constabulary punctilio in strict chronological order with an alphabetical index at the end so he could locate his wife's GOLD TEETH just behind his GARDEN; he had a pile of clean envelopes on the freshly wiped kitchen table, a stack of typing paper, a pencil-case full of sharp pencils.

Before Cestmír Bláha got down to work, he would pace up and down the kitchen gathering his thoughts. In 1954 he paced for three days.

The three oldest of us joined the gendarmerie. Our dad was a gendarme too, and he brought us up to love and respect the profession. All four of us went to war together, the Great War. Dad never returned; he died at the Italian front.

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One brother was wounded by machine-gun fire; he was given a tobacconist's shop in Plzen after the war. I was shot in the face by an Allied soldier, but the bullet went through both my cheeks and out again.

Despite his good aim I must have been meant to stick it out and see it all. The bullet passed right through me, and I've never stopped wondering why. In '38, '50, '54, I couldn't get that shot out of my mind. Why did it go one way and not the other? Why did it desert me? It was in my mouth, it tore my teeth apart. It wanted to stay; they wouldn't let it.

When I came home from the war, there was mother with five little children. I had to be a father to them. It wasn't easy. The Legionnaires were back by then, and I couldn't find a job. I applied at the courthouse and the post office, but they both turned me down. Then in '21 we were mobilized to fight the Communists in Slovakia. They were recruiting gendarmes, and I passed the exams and spent fifteen years in the Subcarpathian Ukraine. It was hard work, but I soon knew my way around. We introduced our system, our building codes, all our ways of doing things. We had to be teachers, lawyers, doctors. My village was fourteen kilometers long, and we had practically no records to go on. After the war twenty to twenty-five percent of the population suffered from syphilis, but they didn't want to be treated. We had to force children to go to school and parents to attend the literacy courses we set up. Russian in the Cyrillic alphabet was the official language. Everything had to be written in two languages. And if you didn't learn a little Yiddish and Hungarian besides, you were in trouble.

Mr. Bláha got up to look for his favorite picture. Whenever he thought of Subcarpathia, he went and stared at that picture. For years it had hung opposite their beds; now it was gone - all that was left was a fuzzy black square. The furniture too was just an outline on the walls: a wardrobe and the heads of the two beds - perhaps to show Death what belonged where.

Where is the house?
Flooded with water.
Where is the water?
Drunk by the oxen . . .

Moving through the creaky rooms, Mr. Bláha patted the old wardrobe, now standing away from the wall, torn from the place where in the last quarter of a century it must have set down roots. He skirted a pile of odds and ends, then salvaged an old razor from it. He was always salvaging something.

He found the picture leaning against the wall. It was wrapped in paper and tied with a string, ready for the move. The gendarme carefully undid his wife's knots and unwrapped the picture as he would a wet baby. Then he took it into the kitchen and closed the door to keep the

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drafts out. It was still comfortable there: there was a fire burning in the stove and the windows facing the road still had their curtains.

The gendarme propped the picture against the sideboard and put the sugar bowl down in front of it to keep it from slipping. Then he sat backwards on a chair, his arms dangling over the backrest, his flat lenses fixed on the picture. What did he see? A wooden village church with an onion dome. It was perched on a bright green hilltop like an Easter chicken, every leaf, every blade of grass distinct.

Just below the church stood a wooden hut straight out of Nikola Suhaj, the gendarmes' enemy number one. There were beans and sunflowers in the garden and daisies along the fence; there was a draw well nearby and a dog sitting at a doghouse, and a lot more - Mr. Bláha couldn't get over how much there was to it, not even after fifty years. It was an honest job, the sum total of what an unknown artist had to say about the landscape, a hymn to a scrap of forgotten land, a memorial to times past.

He had had it done shortly after discovering who set the Sevenír church on fire.

It was the time when people in the Subcarpathian Ukraine were converting back to their true faith, Orthodoxy. They no longer had any use for the Greek Catholic churches and needed new buildings of their own. The Agrarians promised them a church for a given number of votes, the National Socialists an altar. By the time the elections rolled round, a set of bells had been thrown into the bargain. There were sixteen hundred votes in all. The *bíró,* their village elder, worked out who was to vote how, and the gendarme went from house to house collecting the votes. The people were illiterate, so the gendarme punched a hole for each voter.

The deserted Catholic churches flared up like haystacks in a field.

One day there was a fire reported down near the Romanian border. By the time we got there, the bells were dripping like when you spit off a bridge. Monstrances, prayer books, hymnals - everything was going up in smoke.

I went straight to the Orthodox priest, but I couldn't get a word out of him. Don't ask me, he said. I don't know a thing.

Well, you're coming with us, we said. Maybe a few days at headquarters will help you to remember.

But it didn't, and within two days he was released for lack of evidence.

Two weeks later things were kind of slow, so I said, How about a little spin down to Sevenír, boys? and off we went.

They were just starting to drive on the right at the time, and this fellow with a horse came up to us on the left.

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He won't stay on the right, he said, and I can't steer him cause my arm's broke. I was delivering some crates for the priest and the cart turned over on me.

Who were you taking them to?

His - you know - his superior.

A light went on in my head.

Mr. Bláha slipped into the pantry for a beer, opened it against the doorpost, and took a long swig. He enjoyed recalling the events, watching them fit together; he took great pleasure in the logic events acquire when a person can guide and control them.

So we made a quick U-turn. Next stop Father Superior.

Show us that crate, and be quick about it.

We opened it, and there they were: monstrances, vestments, gold chalices - all neatly packed. We threw the crate in the car, the priest too, and chugged merrily off to Khust to turn in the *corpora delicti*.

I got a Letter of Commendation from Prague Headquarters for my investigation of the Senevír fire.

We had five murders per year on the average. Blood feuds, mostly. Once a man butchered another man with an ax during a wedding, and all he got was two years: extenuating circumstances. The First Republic was soft. We were dealing with a backward people, they said. President Masaryk even abolished capital punishment.

He shouldn't have. Two years later the murderer came back from prison and the brother of the man he'd murdered murdered him, and *he* landed in jail. And so it went as long as there were people left to murder.

Mr. Bláha's once vigilant, now weary gaze shifted to the hut, and screwing up his eyes he stared at it as though appraising its value.

One winter some women were plucking chickens in that hut when suddenly they heard breaking glass and saw a window shatter. The bullet lodged in the temple of a sixteen-year-old girl.

It was a real mystery. We knew who had guns for legitimate purposes, but we had no way of finding out about illegal weapons.

It was a lead bullet, which made sense because there was a shooting range nearby. We took careful measurements and went out onto the veranda. There was a big crowd. I leaned against the bannister, peering from face to face. One man dropped his eyes. I sent him over to the cart.

Just you wait.

I walked around the courtyard for a while, thinking, and it came to me. I don't know how, I don't know why, but I went up to the well and leaned against the side, staring down, thinking. I'd never done that before, and suddenly there I was.

Whenever he reached this point, Mr. Bláha would experience an

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acute sense of God; it was God, after all, who had made him a gendarme. And Bláha's God was a watchful, vigilant God, a fiery, ever observant eye.

Down there in the well I saw some bubbles. One bubble, two - and that was it. The firemen pumped the well and found the rifle.

With the lead from the autopsy, the rifle from the well, and the fellow from the veranda, I had enough to show Prague and get things straightened out.

It didn't take long. All I had to do was say, Out with it, Ivan, where'd you get the rifle? And he said, Well, er, I borrowed it off the gamekeeper. He'd cut down fifty-one of the priest's trees one night and the girl had seen him. He got rid of her so she wouldn't turn him in.

We booked him on the trees and premeditated murder. He got twelve years. We were pushovers.

The people wept when we left in '39. "Don't go," they cried. "You taught us to live. Don't go now." But we went. We had to. And how they wept. They remembered the Hungarians' whip, and the Ruthenians - they needed us to get the Jews.

It took me a long time to get the better of a Jew. A Jew would take a Ruthenian to court and win his house away from him, sell it two or three times, then set it on fire and collect the insurance.

The gendarme paced up and down the kitchen, his hands behind his back and a smile beneath his little mustache. He had come back from Subcarpathia with three children and an aversion for Jews. Though he did like matching wits with them. Oh, the joy he felt when they said to him, "We were too smart for you when you first came, but now . . . "

He'd put one over on Moshke all right, but it hadn't been easy.

One day I went to see Vasil Popovich, the *bíró* on the other side of the woods.

What do you say I teach you to sign your name, Vasil my boy.

Two weeks later he came running up, waving his right arm in the air and cursing both it and me.

Damn this hand, he wailed. If only God had struck it down the moment I picked up your pen. Moshke needs a dowry for his daughter, and he shoved a piece of paper in front of me and I wanted to show him I could sign my name and now I owe him two thousand.

Before you came and showed us everything, I'd put my three X's under, he said. Now he was in for it.

Listen, Moshke, I said to the Jew. I've had enough of your shenanigans. You fork up that money or you'll be sorry. I'll ride you hard, I'll shut down your slivovitz still. You'll be out a lot more than the two thousand.

Moshke forked it up. The *bíró* was overjoyed when he saw the

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money and promised me an *áldomás*, a feast. When I told him the money wasn't his and had to go back to the bank where it came from, he was so crushed he burst into tears. So I ran over to Moshke's for a bottle to cheer him up. He drank it all by himself: the stuff that Jew brewed was too much for our stomachs.

All I wish to do, Mr. President, is give you an idea of what a civil servant must face when dealing with a backward people.

Bears, for example. I was walking through the woods one day, thinking about the constable I was going to check up on, when all at once I heard a great din. I turned to see a bear whacking trees with a big branch. Each time it whacked a tree, it would put its ear against it and listen.

So that's it, I said to myself, a honey bear.

I kept an eye on it as it went about its business, and as it paid me no heed, I went on about my own. When I got to the station, I found a forest warden going on about having been attacked by a bear and having to shoot it. He said that they'd skinned the beast on the spot and found a bayonet in one leg.

Odd, I thought. So we went through the files for something that fit, and sure enough we came up with a Hungarian soldier who had brought in a gypsy two years before. We matched up the number of the Hungarian's bayonet with ours. What had become of him? No one knew. And of the gypsy? He'd been thrown in the local jail for killing the soldier. He was a gypsy after all. I took him out to the place where I had seen the bear. I was right: by some miracle my eye happened on a pile of rocks at the edge of the forest, where it began turning into a meadow. I don't know why, but I told the gypsy to start digging. And there, under the rocks, was the soldier - or his rags and rifle and shiny buttons. A bear buries what it doesn't eat.

We set the gypsy free. You can imagine how thrilled he was. Besides, he got ten crowns in damages for every day he'd spent in jail. If I'd asked him to bring me the last needle off that spruce over there, he'd have done it. He was as loyal as a dog.

It was hard work, Mr. President, but the rewards were good. My last salary was eight thousand pre-war crowns a month. Milk cost half a crown, ham five crowns a kilo. My wife and I saved up a hundred thousand three times over and were living high off the hog - until the autumn of '39. One night I came home from emergency duty to find the wife and children gone: they had been evacuated at two o'clock that morning by our soldiers. We were taken to Romania, then Yugoslavia, then Austria, and finally via Brno to Prague. We left everything behind. It was the last we saw of it. They promised us thirty-three thousand in reparations, but all we got was a letter saying they had reached an agreement with the Hungarians and there would be nothing.

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So what! he shouted, thirty years of rage propelling him outside. A glassy pink sun was sinking behind the steeple, fondling the ramshackle houses across the road. The glowing crown of day still ruled in the west, but in the east damp night was on the rise, blacking out the sky. The street was deserted: no one was going anywhere.

That is how it was, Mr. Bláha typed, back in the house. *I was home again, but with no place to live. My wife and children moved in with her parents. I eventually found an opening in K., but the pay was low and I slept at headquarters. Nice welcome home, I thought, but I did my best to get to know the place and do my duty.*

Mr. Bláha went up to the window and looked out over the town that had caused him such grief. It was bleeding now; this was the end. No living thing would come from its womb. It was bleeding to death.

Water tumbled over the shattered weir beneath the windows; a bulldozer was raping the river, ripping the flounces from its petticoat, gouging holes in its body, pummeling it silent. The chief constable was appalled by the branch stumps, the hurriedly sawed trunks, the general devastation. His house too would soon be gone. Turning away, he noticed the two sturdy hooks in the doorway where the curtain for the children's puppet shows had once hung.

How can you do this to us, Lord? To us Christians. *We* didn't crucify Jesus.

The first time he came to the house back in 1939 (he brought the mayor with him) the Wallsteins had stood here in the back room as if *they* were the ones being moved in - Wallstein pale as a winter lantern, his wife weeping bitterly, wringing her hands under her apron. They sensed what was to come.

I know, the mayor said. You're all paid up. But you have to move. There's nothing you can do about it. Bláha, the Chief Constable, will be living here now.

The Wallsteins moved in with the Fogels. The Fogels had seven rooms and Mrs. Wallstein was Mrs. Fogel's sister, so it was all right.

To this day Mr. Bláha had taken the whole thing for granted; it had never occurred to him to question the official decision.

The room, its floor littered with the shadows of ransacked wardrobes, was starting to grow dark. The bleak interval between day and night, the roar of the bulldozer, and the terrible solitude made him see for the first time that he might have been in the wrong. And suddenly there they were, the Wallsteins, the rightful owners - his face like a winter lantern, hers wet with tears; there they stood as they had then, she and her two children with big, black, shining eyes and voices like the wind in winter woods seeking lairs and hollows to rest in, to die in, and

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the Fogels' curly-headed Itsik, wailing miserably the way he wailed when they loaded him into the freight train that took them to the gas chambers.

The room filled with a terrible, eerie, relentless sound, a *sh-sh-sh* coming at him from all sides; the room filled with voices speaking Yiddish. Slowly the voices condensed, taking the shape of the living as they came in contact with the light. The chief constable could not tell whether they were people or shades and did not dare touch them. They floated about like *fata morganas*, their faces merging. He could see them all clearly; he hadn't forgotten what they looked like, not even after thirty years. They emerged from the slanted afternoon light pouring through the open window, even the Carpathian Jews in their bulky black caftans with fur collars, their shiny silver canes and tall black hats. But the eyes were what crushed him, eyes burning out of deep black hollows like suns reflecting out of wells. What lay behind those eyes - memory? death? - Bláha could not tell. All he knew was that the flames were rising higher and higher, ready to burn him, brand him.

It's not my fault, the gendarme whimpered. Wallstein was put on the train a week later, so we didn't even need to move him out. But I didn't know he'd be gassed. How could I have? All I knew was I had a wife and three kids and nowhere to live.

The dead did not respond.

Abraham Schwartz, the local grocer, was standing at the window, as long and thin as a vanilla bean. About a year ago his relatives had taken his remains back to America with them. Someone had sent them the notice in the paper saying that the cemetery was to be flooded and relatives could have their near and dear ones exhumed at their own expense. So the bones dear to his relatives were now near to them as well. May he rest in peace.

Schwartz was beaten to death in 1940 by the Germans. Bláha had been sitting in the next room in his Czech police uniform; he heard Schwartz offer them four million to let him stay in business.

You swine! they shouted. You dirty swine! We'll take the four million and everything you own!

I had no gun! he was about to cry, but his voice froze in horror before the words crossed his lips. They wouldn't give us arms. They were after us the moment they marched in. He broke into sobs of helplessness.

The Jews watched him as he called for help, standing there between the former nursery and the former dining room, death wafting out of the wardrobes. Bláha felt that he'd never lived there, that he'd been assigned the house as a place of penitence once he died. It wasn't a house at all; it was a haunt for bad memories.

The Jews kept coming.

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There was nothing in it for me, Bláha pleaded. Some people began the war with nothing and ended it with beautiful houses. I helped people.

By then it was so dark that the shadows had begun merging with the gloom. Bláha covered his ears with both hands to keep out the awful *sh-sh-sh,* and slowly, cautiously, backed off to avoid touching them. He felt the dead coming together in odd clumps, but he also felt his body turning slick, fish-like: he would glide his way through. At the end of the third room he saw a bright, warm crack - the kitchen door slightly open.

There was nothing I could do, he whimpered. Our orders were to stick to black marketeers. He moved slowly through both rooms, his eye on the beckoning crack, but before he could reach it he tripped over a basket of apples and fell. He felt their cold, slimy fingers on his collar, but wrenched himself away from them and scrambled to his feet. Then he limped his way into the kitchen and collapsed onto the table next to a mug stained with dark tears of coffee. The cat rubbed against his boots.

I helped people, he said, petting the cat. He could feel its faithful heart ticking softly inside its coat. I helped a farmer in the village who had seven kids and was ordered to give up his geese. His family had nothing to eat. I gave him a receipt saying two of the geese had died.

I did what I could, you know, he said to the cat, but in forty-five they were drunk all the time and couldn't keep their mouths shut.

People make things so hard on you, he added with a sob. For six years I risked my skin for them, the gallows over my head every minute, the firing squad. For not reporting anybody.

Once, when they were rounding up suspects after the Heydrich assassination, Captain Vodicka phoned to tell me to expect some gentlemen requiring assistance.

At your service, I replied, and before I could get my clothes on, their car had pulled up to the house.

Sind Sie fertig? they asked.

Ja, ich bin fertig.

We drove to the neighboring village, to the school. They shut one of the teachers in the staff room and posted the mayor by the door. Nobody was allowed out of the building. The teacher had allegedly had his pupils draw pictures of the Spanish Revolution and was in possession of anti-German pamphlets.

They told me to search an area about three meters long, from the window to the door. Hakl, the teacher, gave me a sign with his eyes that said, There's something there. I caught on immediately. So I took off my raincoat, snow and all, and laid it on top of the pamphlets on

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the sewing machine.

Dear Mr. President, he wrote, *I receive only seven hundred crowns a month as an old-age pensioner. According to a recent report from the Ministry of Finance the situation of old-age pensioners will not come up for review until 1970. I have requested an explanation as to why my six years in the World War and my six years under the Occupation have not been counted towards my pension. I was a loyal soldier in the First World War and during the Second, during the Occupation, our work was harder than ever: I had to serve two masters: the Germans and the Czechs. I never forgot my own people.*

They never found them. They even sent me into the kitchen. I told Mrs. Hakl to open all the cupboards and drawers, but I didn't bother to look.

In forty-two her husband kissed my hands and cried, You saved my life! My whole family! People told him to stop his provocations, but he kept beating his chest and saying he was a martyr.

So they threw him in jail for, they say, filching a side of beef and let him rot there till the end because he was a Marxist.

During the Heydrich business I had a gun under every step to the attic. My wife didn't know a thing. As they say: a gendarme knows only as much as his wife tells him.

I had a way with people. I'd spend time with them, chew the fat with them. They knew me. The men who came before me - they were all uniform, all white gloves; they wouldn't give you the time of day. I had a uniform too, of course, but I knew my beat. That came first.

After we were liberated by the Soviet Army, I was named chief constable again and continued to serve the people with all my heart and soul. But Hakl, the teacher, who returned from prison alive and well, was the real power in the district. He hadn't been home two weeks when he ordered me to arrest the postmaster. I refused.

Look, you're not my boss, I said to him. Take him to court if you've got something against him.

If you don't arrest him, somebody else will, he said, and went straight to the Ministry.

He didn't get very far: the Ministry backed *me*.

I won't let you be a dictator, I told him. I represent law and order.

Or so I thought. Because Hakl's sister worked at the Ministry and got him a stamp with some bigwig's signature.

My children were growing up, and I put away all the money I earned. I kept hoping for the day when we could have a roof of our own over our heads.

Mr. President, the gendarme wrote to the head of state - he was coming to the worst period in his life and was at a loss to know how to

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describe it briefly yet fully - *in 1949 I found an application for Party membership on my desk. I thought it strange, because gendarmes have always been forbidden to join political parties (cf. the oath I mentioned earlier), but I submitted it anyway. My children were growing up, and I wanted to buy a house, put a roof over our heads. Imagine my surprise when on 8 December 1950 I received the following - and I quote: "You have been unanimously denied entrance to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia due to circumstances that have come to light in the course of reviewing your application. You may appeal the decision to a superior Party organ."*

Well, that's that, I said to myself. Twenty years in the Subcarpathian Ukraine, ten here - that's enough for a gendarme, an honest gendarme. But no, they didn't want me to quit; they were just trying to transfer me. I don't like it, I told them. I was the last of the old guard - eleven of us there'd been. One of the new men, a red-haired hunchback of a whippersnapper, said to me one day, You served capitalism and the exploiting class. And I said to him, You listen to me, you red-haired hunchback of a whippersnapper, I said, when I was your age I had seven mouths to feed. I've always served the people, and I can prove it. I've never done wrong, never broken the law. The law is my Bible. That time I paced the kitchen three whole days. Window to door back to window. I'm quitting, Mama, I said. But she said they wouldn't let me get away with it. I decided to report sick, but I couldn't bring myself to keep it up.

To preserve my honor, I let myself be transferred. I had to travel twenty kilometers to and from work and start at the very bottom. That is why my pension is so low. I can prove that Vladimír Hakl is responsible for my misfortune because I stood up to him when he tried to set himself up as a dictator.

By 1953 I had finally saved enough to buy a house.

To this day I can see it from my window, Mr. Bláha thought, looking out. There it was among the foliage, its eyes sparkling like gems. Hakl had beaten him to it. It was his lights Bláha was staring into.

The currency reform was the end of me. I was fired a year later. I went down to fifty-eight kilograms. I got ulcers. I was called in and told I should be glad I had any pension at all, it was a gift from the working class.

So you don't even honor your own laws?

I wasn't used to that. A gendarme knows the law inside out. He is always under oath, the oath he took when he took office. And suddenly the law is invalid. I get seven hundred crowns, while every Tom, Dick, and Harry is entitled to eighteen hundred.

I had to slave twenty years to get where I was, and that hunchbacked whippersnapper took over one two three the moment I was gone.

As soon as I'd taught them what they needed, they tossed me out on my

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ear. We were down to nothing again, and we still had the three children, so my wife went to work in her old age. By 1960 we were able to come up with the forty thousand we needed to buy the Jews' house, the one we had been living in. We lived there peacefully until 1963, when a government proclamation concerning the construction of a dam at K. was issued. The Water Board decreed that thirty-five houses would have to be demolished, mine included.

The wife told me to get a move on and find a new place, but I said to myself, You've got land on the hill. Your sons will help. Build a new one.

In 1966, when we were two-thirds of the way through building a new house for ourselves, the Water Board informed us that their original estimate had been erroneous and that the new house would be under water too. We were advised to sell. Finally they forced me into selling for eight thousand by promising me a state subsidy towards the purchase of a new house. But I failed to find a house before the end of that year, and the next year the subsidy ran out and prices doubled. Mr. President, I have written to local offices and I have written to national offices. They all claim that my case has been properly dealt with. Why is it I always lose? If I were to go up to the attic and put a noose around my neck, my wife would inherit the house and get twice as much for it. It would almost pay. After the changes in 1968 I applied for political rehabilitation, but I never received word as to whether the commission had even agreed to consider my case.

I ran into Hakl during the spring of sixty-eight and said to him, Well, Vladimír, what do you make of all this?

You wouldn't do anything now, would you? he said. Not after saving me from the Germans.

You and your whole family, I said.

They'd kicked him out of the National Assembly and hadn't trusted him with anything official since the Slánsky trials.

What did you ever do for me? I said. We never know when we're going to die, and our luck can turn from one day to the next. Though *my* luck was always bad.

I am moving into a prefab flat in O., a combined living-room/bedroom with cooking facilities and central heating. The rent comes to two hundred crowns a month; my pension is seven hundred crowns. The eight thousand I got for the house will be gone in three years. I'll have nothing left.

Mr. President, should you and your office see fit to take up my case, I promise to submit a fully documented record of my life. I have written proof of everything. I will even hand over my bankbooks, which I saved to show my children how frugal and self-sacrificing I was. Now I have nothing, and everyone else is taken care of. That is what I cannot understand.

Translated from the Czech by Michael Henry Heim

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ELIZABETH DALTON

Recognition and Renunciation in *The Ambassadors*

Although James himself thought *The Ambassadors* "quite the best 'all round' of my productions," there has always been an undercurrent of skepticism about the novel, even among his admirers. F. O. Matthiessen complained of the "relative emptiness" of the hero; Strether "does nothing at all" at the end. More recently, Harold Bloom alludes to the "imbalance between the matter and the manner," although like everyone else he concedes that the novel makes "a beautiful pattern."

The crux of this pattern, the fullest revelation of both the matter and the manner, is the recognition scene, when Strether sees Chad and Madame de Vionnet on the river. Despite his reservations about Strether, Matthiessen considers this the most brilliant scene of its kind in James. Indeed James's recognition scenes – those moments when the protagonist, in the prevailing Jamesian metaphor for understanding, "sees" the truth – are the epitome of his method and conception. A skeptic might question the use of the Aristotelian term; after all, the recognitions in Greek tragedy involve matters of great weight: murder, incest, and the passions at the heart of the state and the family. In comparison, the issues in the tragicomic world of *The Ambassadors* may appear trivial. Yet somehow the scene on the water, with its Impressionist pink and turquoise and silver, seems luminous with meaning, suggesting that the moment of recognition is not merely an empty formal event – part of the "beautiful pattern" – but a revelation of passion and fate.

Although in a way Strether "does nothing" afterwards, as Matthiessen avers, from another perspective he does something quite drastic. Like many of James's protagonists, he renounces – love, pleasure, comfort, even, in this case, Paris. This is not really the dénouement of a comedy of manners, but something more akin to the profound and painful reversals of tragedy. The ambiguous language and imagery of the scene on the water, features always present in James but particularly striking here, suggest that the "nothingness" and "emptiness" of the novel and its hero may be quite full, containing a whole shadowy inner world of fantasy, desire, and suffering. Matthiessen described James's fictions as "strictly novels of intelligence," with "none of the welling up of the darkly subconscious life that has characterized the novel since

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Freud," a notion that still prevails. Indeed, so insistent is the emphasis on negation in discussions of *The Ambassadors* – the hero does nothing, there is no subject matter, no unconscious – that one is finally reminded of Freud's understanding of negation as a way of saying "This is something which I should prefer to repress."

The notoriously complex late style is an expression not only of high civilization and intelligence but of unconscious conflict as well, at once revealing and concealing its meaning. To read *The Ambassadors* at all is to interpret ambiguous language. In teasing out its various implications, we are doing no more than Strether himself as he attempts to decipher the cryptic utterances of his Parisian friends, trying to understand what they mean by such words as "virtuous," "free," "beautiful," and so on. Ambiguity is the essence of the novel, the mystery confronting both Strether and the reader as we move with him through its "maze of mystic closed allusions."

The recognition scene occurs in Book XI, when Strether leaves Paris for a day in the country. The very form of this episode makes it a kind of emblematic reduction of the larger action, which is also an excursion, from Strether's home in Woollett, Massachusetts to Paris in search of Chad Newsome and the truth about Chad's friendship with a married woman. The shorter journey, however, is undertaken without any specific goal. Strether gets off the train at a spot "selected almost at random" – where, oddly enough, he stumbles within a few hours onto the very truth that has eluded him for months in Paris. The excursion is a journey into the unconscious, a search for something lost to repression. At some level Strether knows exactly what he's looking for: ". . . he could alight anywhere . . . on catching a suggestion of the peculiar note required."

That note is an atmosphere reminiscent of a painting, a small Lambinet landscape, seen years before in a Boston gallery, for sale at "a price he had never felt so poor as on having to recognize . . . as beyond a dream of possibility." Strether's poverty here suggests not only his lack of money but also the impoverishment of his experience, the deficiency of circumstance or character that he senses so keenly in Gloriani's garden. The subject of the painting, a scene of trees, rushes, and river, is described as "a land of fancy . . . the background of fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of letters." Thus the Lambinet canvas is identified with the rich aesthetic and sensuous experience of French life, which both attracts and frightens Strether. He suggests its psychological significance when he calls it "a land of fancy." The picture contains a fantasy – of aesthetic and sensual fulfillment, a "dream of possibility." The excursion, then, is undertaken not really at random, but under the influence of a very old wishful fantasy. Strether gets out of the train "as securely as if to keep an

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appointment." He feels as though he is stepping inside a picture frame: "the poplars and willows, the reeds and river . . . fell into a composition . . . the sky was silver and turquoise and varnish . . . it was Lambinet. Moreover he was freely walking about in it."

Like Alice stepping through the looking-glass, Strether has broken a barrier. There is a sense of license and danger, suggested by a reference to Maupassant (whom James considered brilliant but "obscene"), but also of euphoria and magical empowerment: "Strether heard his lips, for the first time in French air . . . emit sounds of expressive intention without fear of his company." He's speaking French! Released from inhibition, reclining on a grassy hillside, Strether has "a sense of success, of a finer harmony in things." Falling asleep, he "lost himself anew in Lambinet." He has entered an inner world of unconscious fantasy, a suggestion confirmed by many references in the following pages to "dream" and "fancy."

Strether's nap turns gradually into a reverie about Madame de Vionnet, with whom he's still "careful," fearing "a lapse from good faith." In view of her feeling for Chad and Strether's own diffidence, this fear seems a bit unrealistic. But he continues in this vein, thinking of the "danger of one's liking such a woman too much." His relationship with Chad has by this time undergone a curious reversal. Strether, a man of fifty-five and the fiancé of Chad's mother, has come to Europe like a father retrieving an errant son. As it turns out, however, Chad, in his experience of Paris, of women, of "life," seems immensely older than Strether himself. Strether marvels, "If he's going to make me feel young!" Now, in visiting Chad's beautiful friend alone, in risking "liking such a woman too much," Strether is competing in his diffident way with the more powerful male, as if trying belatedly to achieve an oedipal victory. He has some impression of success: "the after-sense of the couple of hours spent with her, was almost that of fullness and frequency."

Strether seems to be having a rather decorous sexual fantasy here, thinking of "the delightful facility, with such a woman, of arriving at a new tone; he thought, as he lay on his back, of all the tones she might make possible if one were to try her. . . ." The explicit sense concerns Madame de Vionnet's tact and social sensitivity, but the image of her as a responsive musical instrument contains a sexual idea as well. Strether entertains these thoughts while stretched out on his back – a natural position for reverie or fantasy. There is also a suggestion of passivity, further developed in the imagery: "how had their time together slipped along so smoothly, mild but now slow, and melting, liquefying, into his happy illusion of idleness?" This melting and liquefying, the culmination of the fantasy about Madame de Vionnet, suggests orgasm, but also, perhaps, a more primitive idea: it has the diffuse quality of pregenital rather than

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genital pleasure, of the wish to merge with the mother associated with the earliest period of life. Thus although Strether thinks of himself here as successful with a desirable woman, the imagery betrays the childlike passivity that has kept him from the freedom and fullness of adult experience he envies in other men.

For the moment, however, Strether feels as if he is part of the bright scene of life, inside "the oblong gilt frame," instead of a dim, excluded spectator. At the end of this charmed afternoon "in the picture," he finds himself at a small inn, with "the river flowing behind or before it – one couldn't say which," in an ambiguous watery landscape that echoes the earlier melting and liquefying. Now out of this pre-oedipal landscape rises "a stout white-capped deep-voiced woman" – the innkeeper. With her stout body and deep voice, this woman seems almost more male than female; yet she may nonetheless correspond to an aspect of the maternal imago – perhaps to the sexually undifferentiated "phallic mother" of earliest childhood.

Indeed, all the women in the novel play some maternal role for Strether – whether to boss him around like Mrs. Newsome and her daughter Sarah, to guide and instruct him like Maria Gostrey, or to be idealized like Madame de Vionnet. The innkeeper, performing the function par excellence of the pre-oedipal mother, offers to give him dinner as a "comfortable climax" – comfortable, perhaps, because it involves only nourishment. Any climax associated with adult sexuality might generate conflict and fear – such as the feeling of danger in visiting Madame de Vionnet. Thus, although Strether's journey into the unconscious began with thoughts of a possible oedipal victory, he seems to have withdrawn into an earlier fantasy, with images of fusion and of appetites passively gratified by a presexual mother who is somehow both male and female. In this "land of fancy" – perhaps infancy as well as fantasy – the moment of recognition will occur. It will involve the reality of sexual difference, with the attendant anxieties, which this soothing maternal land-and-waterscape seems to deny.

Strether sits down near a landing where some small boats are tied up:

> . . . the view had an emptiness that made one of the boats suggestive. Such a river set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars – the idle play of which would be moreover the aid to the full impression. This perception went so far as to bring him to his feet; but that movement, in turn, made him feel afresh that he was tired, and while he leaned against a post and continued to look out he saw something that gave him a sharper arrest.

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The description here is indeed "suggestive" – of beauty, pleasure, "idle play," with a hint of danger. What it evokes is the life of the senses, that aspect of experience Strether feels he has missed (he thinks of his own lost youth as "to a degree it had never been, an affair of the senses"). If Strether were to row out on this stream, he would be launched – "afloat" on the river of life; at least he'd be paddling his own canoe, instead of merely watching from the riverbank.

But the hesitant middle-aged man cannot be so easily transformed. Strether gets to his feet but immediately feels tired. The act of standing erect in an attitude suggesting assertive male sexuality is too much for him; he has to lean against a post. The contrast with the ease he felt earlier while lying on his back is striking. He then sees something that gives him pause – a sharp "arrest"; the forceful word brings with it connotations of transgression and punishment, implying that what Strether is about to see is forbidden. What he sees, however, is "exactly the right thing – ":

> . . . a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures . . . had been wanted in the picture. . . .

Until now a land- and waterscape, the canvas has required at its center figures in whom its human meaning might be figured forth: the man and woman full of youth, sex, and beauty – the embodiment of natural forces. Strether's attempt to occupy this spot at the center of things was bound not to come off.

The appearance of this couple is charged with meaning for Strether, who has failed in his own attempt to venture out on the water:

> The air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent – that this wouldn't at all events be the first time. They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt.

Although the explicit subject is skill in boating, the language evokes a second meaning almost more conspicuous than the first. The words "expert, familiar, frequent" suggest the easy gratification of a successful sexual relationship. This finally becomes nearly explicit in "They knew how to do it."

As Strether watches, the boat comes near enough for him to "dream," as he says, that the lady has seen him:

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> She had taken in something as a result of which their course had wavered. . . . This little effect was . . . so rapid that Strether's sense of it was separate only for an instant from a sharp start of his own. He too had within the minute taken in something, taken in that he knew the lady whose parasol . . . made so fine a pink point in the shining scene. It was too prodigious, a chance in a million, but, if he knew the lady, the gentleman . . . the coatless hero of the idyll, who had responded to her start, was, to match the marvel, none other than Chad.

The couple in rhythmic motion, the lady who has "taken in something," the climactic moment of wavering – all the language and imagery suggest that the scene is a representation, disguised after the fashion of dreams, of the sexual act.

Strether's belated realization that Chad and Madame de Vionnet are sexually intimate will grow out of this unexpected meeting with them. Moreover, that knowledge has been so long resisted, and now strikes with such force, for a specific reason. Their relationship has seemed " 'a high fine friendship. . . . It can't be vulgar or coarse.' " Strether agrees with little Bilham's estimation of it as " 'the very finest thing I ever saw in my life, and the most distinguished.' " The intensity of this idealization points to another relationship, idealized at some point by everyone – that of the two parents. In discovering the obvious truth about his friends, Strether is recapitulating the child's discovery of the parents' sexuality, with all the typical feelings of fascination and dismay. Thus the recognition scene can be understood as an exquisitely sublimated representation of what Freud calls the primal scene – the child's observation or fantasy of parental intercourse. In fact, the telltale absence of clothing that gives the lovers away – they claim to have left Paris dressed as they are and just for the day, yet the gentleman is coatless and the lady has no shawl – is an allusion to the nudity of the primal scene.

The conceit of the Lambinet painting is crucial here. It frames the scene and turns it into a picture, something that may legitimately be gazed at, thus desexualizing and aestheticizing it. The pervasiveness in *The Ambassadors* (and in all of James's writing) of occasions for looking and images of seeing, and the continual emphasis on seeing as the supreme metaphor for understanding, suggest a great weight of unconscious meaning. Seeing is eroticized; moreover, looking and understanding are less dangerous substitutes for acting. But even seeing has its perils. Strether and the two lovers must decide whether to acknowledge one another, and that critical moment is described in language that hints at the fears aroused by forbidden seeing:

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> It was a sharp fantastic crisis that had popped up as if in a dream, and it had had only to last the few seconds to make him feel it as quite horrible. . . . he had . . . to settle their common question by some sign of surprise and joy . . . agitating his hat and stick and loudly calling out – a demonstration that brought him relief. . . . The boat went a little wild. . . . Chad turned round, half springing up; and his good friend . . . began gaily to wave her parasol. . . .

The impression here is of something dreamlike, "sharp," "horrible," language quite out of proportion to the actuality of an awkward social situation, but perhaps not to the "sharp fantastic crisis" symbolically enacted. The child interrupting or imagining a sexual scene sees something that "pops" or springs up, something "wild," full of "agitation." This incomprehensible activity is likely to strike the child as "quite horrible." Its sharpest threat – castration – is suggested a few lines later by Strether's "odd impression as of violence averted – the violence of their having 'cut' him. . . ."

As if to guard against this danger, phallic gestures abound. Madame de Vionnet's pink parasol, thrice mentioned and gaily waved, is perhaps a denial of the dreadful idea that the woman is castrated, and Strether feels better after agitating his hat and stick. The connection between sex and violence may even be hinted at in the place from which Strether watches the scene, the "primitive pavilion testifying, in its somewhat battered state, to much fond frequentation." Oddly enough, although Chad and Madame de Vionnet have been compromised, it is Strether who feels guilty, who has "the worrying thought of their perhaps secretly suspecting him of having plotted this coincidence. . . ." In the unconscious, such coincidences, however they may be produced, are not accidental; their occurrence fulfills an unconscious intention and thus creates a disquieting effect of the uncanny. Strether's reiterated amazement suggests this: "it was too prodigious, a chance in a million." Of course, the odds against such a chance meeting with friends are much diminished if one has spent three months speculating about their activities.

Strether has pursued his interest in Chad and Madame de Vionnet with the relentless curiosity of the oedipal child. Maria tells him that his friends may leave Paris for a time. " 'Do you mean in order to get away from me?' " he asks, and she replies, " 'Don't find me rude if I say I should think they'd want to!' " But they can't get rid of him. Strether finds their hideaway with the child's unerring instinct for interrupting the sexual life of its parents. Stated broadly, his wish is to understand the nature of the relationship between a man and a woman. This is a recurring pattern in James's work. The innocent protagonist looks on in wonder at the alluring and repellent spectacle of adult passion. At the end of this

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chapter, Strether – like Isabel Archer, or Maisie Farange, or Hyacinth Robinson – "found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things."

The typical response of the child enlightened about sex is disillusionment, particularly with the mother, who seems suddenly defiled and unfaithful. Something of this attitude appears in Strether's changed vision of Madame de Vionnet. During their encounter in the country she is so rattled that she loses her English and for the first time speaks to him in French, "shifting her back into a mere voluble class or race. . . . When she spoke the charming slightly strange English he best knew her by he seemed to feel her as a creature, among all the millions, with a language quite to herself. . . ." Unique among the millions, endowed with a special language, Madame de Vionnet had been very like the child's idealized vision of the mother. Now she has re-entered her "mere voluble class or race"; she has become, in other words, an ordinary sexual woman.

During his sleepless night following the encounter, Strether thinks about "intimacy revealed": "Intimacy, at such a point, was *like* that. . . . It was all very well for him to feel the pity of its being so much like lying." The tone here is not that of a man who has had a wife and child, but the virginal amazement of a young person. The revulsion at sex is suggested by the comparison with lying – which, as every child knows, is wrong. Yet a certain kind of lying is inseparable from sex, in that the couple must protect its privacy, especially from the curiosity of the child. Sex is thus always somehow compromised and morally ambiguous. It can never be pure, as Strether has wanted the relationship of his friends to be – or as the child wants its parents to be. The adult in Strether knows all this; he expresses his embarrassment at his own childishness in an image that contains many of the conflicts dramatized in this episode: "he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll." The characteristic vagueness – in the river scene, Strether "vaguely felt" that "they knew how to do it" – conceals bodies whose nakedness would reveal disturbing genital difference.

The fact that the child here is a girl suggests this anxiety about masculinity and sexual difference; perhaps the girl, with her "castrated" body, has less to lose in sex. Moreover, the girl with the doll plays at the reversal and mastery of dependency on the mother; with her make-believe baby she is also playing at adult sexual life, at which she is only a spectator – like Strether, who feels "lonely and cold," like a child excluded from the parents' intimacy. The image of the girl with her doll may even reveal something about the impulse behind the style of the novel, that difficult late style that also dresses possibility in vagueness, often enveloping persons and their actions in nearly impenetrable ambigu-

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ity. Pronouns change antecedents without warning: "he," "she," and "they" become screens or masks, concealing rather than indicating identity. Actions are also veiled, in generalized, abstract, or metaphoric language that may apply to a wide range of referents – as in "they knew how to do it" – from the specifically physical and material to the broadly moral and spiritual.

Objects too may be veiled in ambiguity, like the nameless article on whose manufacture the Newsome fortune depends, mentioned early in the novel, evoked again in the last scene, never identified. " 'It's a little thing they make,' " says Strether mysteriously, and despite his assurances to the contrary, Maria immediately imagines it's something "bad." The "little thing" – both "familiar" and "vulgar" – becomes the subject of "fancy," associated with "infamies," "practices," "shame." Here again vagueness, the refusal to limit and specify, hints at something concealed, like the veiled sexual mysteries at the heart of the novel, and opens the door to fantasy. By not being named, this "thing" begins to suggest the crude phallic power of the Newsomes, passed down from the rapacious grandfather through the domineering Mrs. Newsome to her aggressive daughter, Sarah, and her conspicuously potent son, Chad. In Strether's refusal, in this early scene, to give Maria the name of the crucial little article, we might even see a prophetic hint of the way their relationship will end.

The greater ambiguity and abstractness of James's late style seem to correspond to the increasingly disturbing quality of his subject matter. Described baldly, James's plots involve exchanges of sex, money, and social status, especially in the later works, with their adulterous, incestuous, and fortune-hunting lovers. The point, of course, is that the novels themselves never do describe such matters baldly, but in a densely metaphoric prose that transubstantiates everything physical and material into some ineffable stuff of consciousness whose specific referents are at times entirely obscured. The rich ambiguity of this prose functions not only to express the multiple meanings of its subject, but also to conceal them. The revealing and concealing metaphors are elaborated in a syntax infinitely subdivided, the graphic representation of a consciousness whose progressive, narrative impulse is continually checked by conflicts, hesitations, qualifications.

In *The Ambassadors*, the style induces in the reader something of the very conflict that is the subject of the novel. Infinitely open to interpretation, the language entices the reader into a hermeneutic effort almost prurient in its intensity. One finds oneself straining to see over and around and through the words with something of the feverish and frustrated curiosity of the child at the bedroom door. At some level, of course, just as the child has some notion of the nature of its parents' re-

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lationship, so Strether must have known that Madame de Vionnet was Chad's mistress. In fact, this was the very idea he started out with. After the scene on the river, he imagines Maria asking, " 'What on earth – that's what I want to know now – had you then supposed?' He recognized at last that he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing." He had been trying, that is, to repress his adult knowledge of sexuality, because of the fantasies and fears aroused in him by the lovers. Recognition is not, after all, first knowledge, but re-cognition, a re-knowing of something lost to repression. The recognition scene dramatizes the return of the repressed.

The implications of the scene on the river are played out in Book XII. Strether has a final interview with Madame de Vionnet in which she acknowledges more openly than ever the peril of her situation vis-à-vis her restless young lover. She seems older, "visibly less exempt from the touch of time," and "vulgarly troubled." Strether finds it "appalling" that such a woman can be "by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited." He is particularly disturbed by the moral disparity between Madame de Vionnet and her lover. She is "the finest and subtlest creature," while Chad is "only Chad" – fundamentally the same crude and unimaginative young man who left Woollett. What on earth does she see in him? His lack of moral or intellectual distinction makes the answer obvious: Chad's power of attraction is sex. He is a beautiful, glossy young male, fully at ease with his sexuality. The very lack of other qualities, the shallowness and caddishness suggested even in his name, highlight a sexual power that may be especially attractive to the supercivilized woman – or man – trapped in the exquisite cage of culture and tradition.

Strether finds this "so hard it was fairly grim"; for him, "the real coercion was to see a man ineffably adored." Through the grim, coercive power of sex, Madame de Vionnet has been made vulnerable to age, exploitation, and vulgar trouble. She has become, if only in her own estimation, "old and abject and hideous," whereas Chad is at least superficially improved. Here, as elsewhere in James, notably in *The Sacred Fount*, sex is ultimately a vampirish transaction in which one partner is subject to grim exploitation by the other. In *The Ambassadors*, the images suggest some of the ideas behind that representation. Indeed, this quiet evening encounter is permeated with imagery of violence. The noises of the city remind Strether of "the days and nights of revolution" and "the smell of blood." Madame de Vionnet seems dressed "as for thunderous times," like Madame Roland on the scaffold. Referring to her certainty of losing Chad, she speaks of living "in terror" – like the aristocrat condemned by the revolutionary Terror.

The imagery of the recognition scene reappears here. The water in

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which Madame de Vionnet seemed to float so expertly in the scene on the river now begins to engulf her. Water "had never risen higher than round this woman." Fantasies of danger and death multiply: Madame de Vionnet is drowning, she is going to the guillotine. The decapitation of a woman suggests the castrated genitalia. No wonder the sexual relationship strikes Strether as "hard" and "grim." It evokes the smell of blood; it leads to castration and death. As Strether puts it to Madame de Vionnet, " 'You're afraid for your life!' "

After this encounter, Strether meets briefly with Chad – telling him he'll be a "brute," a "criminal of the deepest dye" if he leaves Madame de Vionnet – then pays a last visit to Maria Gostrey. In this final scene, the characteristic Jamesian movement from recognition to renunciation occurs. Strether, having lost Mrs. Newsome and her fortune, now refuses the offer of life in Paris with Maria. Matthiessen attributes Strether's decision to "unacknowledged love" for Chad's mistress. But Strether's attraction to Madame de Vionnet is in one crucial way hardly more powerful than his fondness for Maria: both interests lack the force of sexual desire. The fact that Strether can be drawn sexually to a woman might seem to be established by the story of his early marriage, but that episode is so dimly sketched that it is far from convincing. In any case, "the young wife he had early lost," like Madame de Vionnet, like all sexual relationship, is associated with injury and death.

There is, of course, a character who is able, unlike Strether, to play the man's part in the scene of sexuality, and that is Chad. Strether's rejection of Maria also has something to do with him. Although it is mainly the woman who suffers the harshness of sex – " 'when a woman's hit,' " says Maria, " 'it's very awful' " – for the man too, there is danger – something "awe"-ful. On first meeting Chad, Strether recognizes in him "the young man marked out by women; . . . the dignity, the comparative austerity . . . of this character affected him almost with awe. There was an experience on his interlocutor's part. . . ."

Experience with women is seen here as a kind of austere discipline, an ordeal for which Chad has been destined by his unambiguous masculinity. Strether regards him with boyish "awe" – and perhaps with something more. He is struck by Chad's "palpable presence and his massive young manhood"; here and throughout, the reader is made powerfully aware of Chad as a phallic presence "massive" and "palpable" through Strether's own response. Maria appeals to Strether mainly because of her knowledge and wit. Madame de Vionnet, though exquisite, is somehow quite bodiless. The descriptions of Chad, however, are lushly physical. He is "brown and thick and strong . . . he was actually smooth . . . as in the taste of a sauce or the rub of a hand.. . . . The phenomenon . . . was marked enough to be touched by the finger." And

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Strether puts his hand on Chad's arm. This homosexual element is the other side of Strether's diffidence with women, of the passivity that overtakes him when he tries to stand up, step inside the picture frame, and participate in the scene of heterosexual life. He explains his refusal of Maria in moral terms, presenting it as an act of self-denial, " 'That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself.' " But it is set in the context of an oddly revealing image. " 'I'm not,' he explained, leaning back in his chair, but with his eyes on a small ripe round melon – 'in real harmony with what surrounds me.' " The seductive little melon is an emblem of the sensuous pleasures that do not truly tempt him.

Strether has made the familiar Jamesian bargain, acquiring a more developed consciousness – "wonderful impressions" – at the cost of material and sexual advantage. But like all the great decisions in life, this one is not entirely conscious and voluntary. He cannot do otherwise than he does. Strether has wanted to understand, above all to *see*. And what he sees, finally, is a representation of the encounter that is the source of life. Perhaps the observer who cannot re-enact this scene himself is the one to give us the keenest sense of its pathos and danger. Sex is shown in the novel not only in its sensuous natural beauty and its power to educate and transform, but also in its inextricable connection with violence, suffering, age, and death. The power and terror of this recognition confirm Strether in his sense of his own incapacity. He chooses the part of knower and watcher rather than actor in the scene

James himself seems to have found this pattern in his own earliest memories, among them the poignant image in *Notes of a Son and Brother* of "the bright compound wistfully watched in the confectioner's window, unattainable, impossible." The wistful child spectator somehow utterly cut off from the image behind the glass, a scene of the vivid sweetness of life, is very like the young man in the Boston gallery gazing hopelessly at the Lambinet canvas, or the older figure on the riverbank watching the couple on the water. Through Strether, James shows us something of the nature and cost of seeing – which is just what he set out to do. "The precious moral of everything," he wrote in the preface to *The Ambassadors*, "is just my demonstration of this process of vision."

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IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ

Morris Raphael Cohen and the Classical Liberal Tradition

The philosophy department at the City College of New York was Morris Raphael Cohen's department. That it fractured on political grounds was inevitable, given the climate of opinion in the 1930s. Still, the quality of mind, from Abraham Edel in moral theory, to Daniel Bronstein in symbolic logic, to Philip Wiener in the history of ideas, to Henry Magid in political thought, and finally to Yervant A. Krikorian in philosophical psychology, was extraordinary. The department honored the memory of Cohen precisely with the steady stimulus provided by a contentious group. In its soul, the department illustrated the lessons of liberalism: civility in dealing with one another and equity in dealing with students. Students learned the legends of Cohen, because whatever persuasion his progeny turned out to be, they reflected and refracted his sense of the bracing character of an honest exchange of ideas.

Cohen was born in Minsk, Russia in 1880. He came to the United States at the age of twelve in 1892. Doubtless, Minsk, a center of both the Jewish enlightenment and classical Hebrew learning had an enormous and lifelong impact on Cohen. Long before it was fashionable, if indeed it has ever been fashionable, he championed Jewish interests. In 1933, just as Hitler came to power in Germany, he founded the Conference on Jewish Relations, an organization that assumed responsibility for scientific research on Jewish problems. In 1939, he founded *Jewish Social Studies*, which today remains a central publication on the subject. Both his autobiography, *A Dreamer's Journey*, published in 1949, and a posthumous collection of briefer pieces, *Reflections of a Wandering Jew*, issued a year later, document this life-long involvement in Jewish affairs. In *The Faith of a Liberal*, such interests are reflected in his choice of heroes: Spinoza is the "prophet of liberalism"; of the "three great judges" Cohen singles out, two are Jewish: Brandeis and Cardozo; the final "heroic figure" to

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which he gives special attention is Albert Einstein. But the key to Cohen's vision of the place of the Jew in American civilization is contained in his essay first published in *The New Republic* in 1919, immediately after the First World War. He does not deny the "tribal" aspects of Zionism. Indeed, he gives it a painfully accurate rendering. Cohen concludes, however, by noting that "Zionism has rendered the supreme service of increasing men's self-respect, and has helped men to realize that they must be ready to give of their own past experience as well as to accept. For this, the American ideal of civil and political liberty still provides a fair field."

This quintessential search for a level playing field links Cohen's faith in a liberal Judaism with his commitment to law and justice as such. But his work in legal philosophy remains pivotal to this day. His book *Law and Social Order* is anticipated in the essay, "Constitutional and Natural Rights in 1789 and Since." Here he separates himself from the conservative notion that the courts should limit themselves to decision-making in terms of the literal words of the Constitution. For Cohen, this "fiction" only relieves the law of taking responsibility for critical decisions and serves to justify the terrible disparity between power and responsibility. It is the empirical foundations of decision-making that determine the interpretation of law. And beyond that, anticipating the social consequences of decision-making distinguishes totalitarianism from liberalism.

Cohen's powerful sense of the law as being essentially *active* may well have been fueled by his no less deep sense of injustice. Although he was a graduate of the City College of New York, that revered institution with which he maintained a lifelong love affair – never mind association – and a graduate from the philosophy department at Harvard University in 1906, he was hired to work in the mathematics department at City College. Only six years later, in 1912, was he allowed to enter the philosophy department. Yet this involuntary exile was not an unmitigated disaster, since the years of association with mathematicians gave Cohen a feeling for logic and scientific method that often escaped others who had uncritically embraced pragmatic philosophy.

To be sure, Cohen came to scorn those who had a "popular science" image of actual processes involved in experimentation and research. He may be declared by *The Columbia Encyclopedia* to be "one of the most important American philosophers since William James," but he was in fact far more beholden to Charles Sanders Peirce's "realism" than to either Jamesian or Deweyian varieties of pragmatism. Throughout his life, in almost Kantian fashion, he identified with science as an end in itself, or at least with a concern to establish all possible causal linkages, great and small. Neither Peirce nor Cohen believed for a moment "that action was

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the ultimate end of man." An implicit juxtaposition of Peirce against James and Dewey – against a philosophical tradition "centered about man's psychologic nature and moral duties" – was leveled by Cohen as ultimately narrow, impoverished, and illiberal. His own sense of science was something that rises above a sense of immediate urgency. And he invokes authorities from Plato to Spinoza to identify the love of wisdom as nothing short of the conduct of science and mathematics. I think it fair to say that in his vision of the scientific, Cohen was far closer to the conservative tradition he eschewed than to the modern liberalism he claims to have embodied. Just how his legal empiricism coincided with scientific rationalism remains a problem, not just for Cohen but for modern intellectual history as a whole. For if law is but a thing-for-us while science is a thing-for-itself, just what hope is there for a unified or integrated vision of the moral order?

Increasingly, Cohen's revulsion for doctrines of activism were further fueled by the rising tide of authoritarianisms right and left during the 1920s and 1930s. At a time when it was hardly fashionable, Cohen wrote his famous essay, "Why I Am Not a Communist." It was a blistering indictment of the Soviet regime and of Leninist ideology. Ultimately it was intellectual disdain of fanaticism and irrationalism that made any possibility of lining up with communism impossible. And in one of his typical literary asides, he notes of the choice between communism and fascism, "I feel that I am offered the choice between being shot and being hanged." Liberal society, American society, should not be compelled into a false choice, since neither variety of totalitarianism exhausts human possibilities. And liberalism is ultimately a matter of human possibilities.

Cohen loved that word "possibilities," for in it he saw the essence of Americanism, whether speaking of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* or Vernon Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*. And science and literature intersect in confronting the conundrum of the nature of knowledge. The critical and skeptical spirit of American literature and science makes for distrust of tempting generalizations or self-evident truths – but this also makes possible the liberal imagination itself. In an interesting note on Russian character, he speaks of the interest in concrete science and general mysticism and the absence of "abstract questions of scientific method" – questions so characteristically present in the kind of liberal thinking portrayed by Cohen. In this, he is part of a long line of American thinkers who linked scientific method with the liberal spirit, even if that connection could not always be made theoretically clear.

The final essay, "The Future of American Liberalism," is the only statement he wrote specifically for *The Faith of a Liberal*. It is not a simple essay, for Cohen is at some pains to square liberalism with *political* in-

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dividualism and *economic* collectivism. Here, the acclaim of liberalism is more a reflection of the New Deal philosophy that emerged triumphant at the end of the Second World War than a theorist's search for new vistas. Cohen could write, "We need a certain amount of sociability," and follow this immediately with a Millsian concern that "'nevertheless too much sociability is inimical to thought." A strange platitudinousness envelops Cohen's last writings on liberalism, as if at hand were a sense of the closure of old liberal verities and a corresponding fear that the new liberalism would not exactly foster his own vision of "free thought" and an "enlarged vision of the good life."

It is not unfair to say that Cohen was simultaneously caught up in the Greek ideal of the good life and the American ideal of the practical life. Cohen did not, indeed could not, resolve the issue of how ancient thought and modern industrial society might coalesce, the two making even theoretically an uneasy alliance. Perhaps the problem is one of labels: if the world is not exhausted by communism and fascism, then neither is it exhausted by liberalism or conservatism. At his best, Cohen understood this. The much vaunted Socratic method stood in contradistinction to the Platonic definition of the Socratic dialogue.

The Faith of a Liberal ends with the triumph of the process over the decadence of the structure. "So in life there is growth and decay. In human history there are ups and downs. There are periods of flowering and periods of decay. There is no use," Cohen concludes, "in thinking that any one movement of history, or of human life, will continue forever." Liberalism ultimately consists in this sense of openness or at least of the absence of closure. Cohen's last book remains a marvelous, vital guide for the perplexed. It is a tragic reminder of how far down the path of totalitarian temptation even the blessed vision of liberalism has traveled. Even the best systems of thought fail to continue forever.

Cohen was part of that special generation that transplanted the classical liberal tradition onto American soil. The first half of the twentieth century revealed a liberalism positioned between fascism and communism, or, if one prefers, between the political right and left. Like others of his time, Cohen had a lasting and innate suspicion of ideological extremism and psychological exaggeration. He envisioned liberalism as the natural handmaiden of a scientific world view, but one which was also tolerant of religious belief the way the scientist is appreciative of the limits of exact knowledge. For all of his sense of epistemological differences with people like John Dewey and the pragmatic tradition in general, he shared with his philosophical cohort common concerns in education, law, and literature. He was a Russian Jew, without the aristocratic nativism of either Ralph Barton Perry's New England tradition or Vernon Parrington's frontier spirit, yet he also shared with them the American

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dream. Cohen's liberalism takes many forms and has a plurality of authentic voices and postures. What gave liberalism its resilience was less a code of conduct or a system of beliefs than those forms of conduct it eschewed and those systems of belief it condemned.

In an age where liberalism has become part of the polarity – the anticonservative side of the discursive axis – Cohen's type of liberalism, a positioning between extremes, may seem somewhat archaic, even eccentric. But in Cohen's time, it was the quintessential approach to life and letters. To those for whom notions of equity and liberty were the best, perhaps the only, guarantors of minority rights and majority rules, liberalism made sense of the world. To the extent that such an old-fashioned idea remains valid, Cohen's work will continue to occupy a special place in American intellectual history.

Vladimir Tismaneanu

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POEMS

ANNE STEVENSON

Salter's Gate

for Peter

There, in that lost
corner of the ordnance survey.
Drive through the vanity –
two pubs and a garage – of Satley,
then right, cross the A68
past down-at-heels farms and a quarry,

you can't miss it, a T instead of a +
where the road meets a wall.
If it's a usual day
there'll be freezing wind, and you'll
stumble climbing over the stile
(a ladder, really) as you pull

your hat down and zip up your jacket.
Out on the moor,
thin air may be strong enough to
knock you over,
but if you head into it
downhill, you can shelter

in the wide, cindery trench of an old
leadmine-to-Consett railway.
You may have to share it
with a crowd of dirty
supercilious-looking ewes, who will baaa
and jerkily run away

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after posting you a mad stare
from their boxy pupils.
One winter we came across five
black, icicle-crowned cows.
But in summer, when the heather's full of nests,
you'll hear curlews

following you, haunting your memory, maybe,
with their eerie cries;
or, right under your nose,
a grouse will whirr up surprised,
like a poet startled by a good line
when it comes to her sideways.

There are no – well, very few – trees.
Hawthorn the English call May,
a few struggling birches.
But of wagtails and yellowhammers, plenty,
and peewits who never say *peewit*,
more a minor, *go'way go'way*.

Lots of clouds, soot-purple like the sheep,
though sometimes fleecy enough,
Blake's lambs grazing
light blue fields in his Jerusalem?
Not at Salter's Gate.
They raise animals to eat in England's Durham.

Salter. Who was he? Why was this his gate?
Maybe the base root's *saltus*,
Latin for leap. The place has a feeling of
survival, its unstoppable view,
a reservoir, ruins of the lead mines, new
forestry pushing from the right, the curlew.

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STEPHEN YENSER

A Table of Greene Fields

For Willard Yenser

Your wife, who polished verse,
Was duty–bound to quarrel
With much that we'd rehearse
For you at the corner billiard parlor:
The homespun language,
And where to put the accents
For English and massé
And how to break loose racks,

And cut, and kiss, and bridge.
You never could insist
That we play for small change
But hated to see us risk
Minimal earnings
Before we'd learned to hold
Our own with hustlers
Whom you'd have shot blindfold.

Now, shuffling through a haze
Denser than that in Scotty's
Those hot, long Saturdays
You worry you've forgotten
There by your river, where duller
Colors carom from bank
To bank across
The fading felt, the rankest

Double-cross, you play
Again. You're under the gun
Again and bound to stay,
As always, till you've won -
Or followed through
On one last stroke and seen
That the sun has spun
Home under darkening green.

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STEVEN CRAMER

After Bypass

for my mother

The room, violet with iris and stasis, reeked
Those afternoons I sat with you; workers
In dustmasks thronged the skeletal girders
Just outside your window. Pouring concrete

Or crouched brooding over their blueprints,
They huddled and consulted like the doctors
We quizzed together, or I'd quiz as you slept.
Seasoned patients wobbled down the corridor,

Clutching red, heart-shaped pillows, inscribed
With the surgeon's autograph, and cross-
Sections of their reconstructed arteries,
All their lesions or occlusions cured.

Fresh from surgery, your sewn-up chest
Almost glowed through the sheer nightgown,
Its embossed ridge of stitches curving down
Between your breasts. What son could resist

A furtive look? When once you briefly woke
To my staring, I felt sure you'd recognized
That boy caught peeking through a dime-sized
Scratch in the whitewashed bathroom window

Thirty summers ago – an afternoon I took a dare
That left me exposed to you, breasts and hair
A white and dark ringing I couldn't name.
Today your yellowing catheter bag is gone,

And stabbing cries down the hall resound
Like a newborn. But it's pain
You wake to on this ward, and sutured wounds –
A husband dead, a son – no sedative can numb.

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Opening your eyes to the son who's left,
Those workers, you say, *are perfect gentlemen.*
I take your arm, it's time for exercise; we join
The others, hugging those hearts to their chests.

STUART DISCHELL

The Retirement of the Troubadour

I

How simple the words seem,
Slight and well meant,
Not a crime but not an achievement,
He mourns for each of them.
When they came from him they were bright.
It is we who have tarnished them.

II

The subjects were the heart and hurt.
Hardly popular in any age.
No pity please. That life was sweet
As sleeping late. Women and men
At their various situations,
In language any fool could understand.

III

Cathedrals rising from the fields,
Those images spoke for themselves
And of the rooms he had inhabited,
Shrines to the demi- and full goddesses.
The smell of the sex on his body,
In the half-light his unsung aubades.

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IV

He remembers the dark street and the sun
Just rising. Beloved demi-monde,
That life is gone. In his hand
The crescent moon of a broken saucer,
A torn admission to the domestic theatre.
Under his hat the memory of stars.

ALFRED CORN

From *1992*

8.

1974

I'm with Walter now, he's driving, we've left
D. C. behind as we make our way northwest
through Maryland to Harper's Ferry – our first
road trip together, one of the scarce occasions
when we have time to go into our origins.
In shards and fragments, he gives the story
of his ancestors, gentlemen farmers in Hungary,
the War, the betrayals, the grandfather who
didn't survive Auschwitz;
the grandmother who did, her life as a cook
in Catskill resort hotels, lately retired
at a group home in Detroit. His own mother's death.
Silence and a hand placed lightly on his
are as much as I can do. Trees rushing by,
a sinking sun caught in them. Wordlessness,
more than anything else, was how we communicated.

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Five o'clock when we arrive, but there's time
to stand on a bluff overlooking the handsome
confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah,
several houses from the early 1800s,
quietly regarding us while a twilight
soft as down creeps in from all sides,
scent of chestnut leaf and flower expanding,
a distant plash of waters, and the whispered
sensation of backward-stretching time, remote
and deep as Appalachia. A brief promenade's
muffled footfalls resound with the gravity
lent to any earth where blood was once shed.

On to Virginia, a hotel booked within sight
of the Blue Ridge. After dinner in our top-floor room
a windowseat offers the best prospect of the moon
levitating over black foothills, night breezes
heavy with perfume from flowers on the silk tree
below – a favorite species of Mr. Jefferson's,
I recall reading somewhere. From the pint flask
that used to go everywhere with me I've poured
a double shot these ice-cubes will only halfway
cool down. Out over the lawn, fireflies bestir
themselves, rise, signal. An image floats up,
how five summers ago Ann and I caught them and turned
Mason jars into short-term, green-flickering lamps.
Would she remember that? I'll ask when we meet
next month. But wait, what was – ? A bright strobe
wide as the sky switches on, sheet-lightning playing
back and forth to the roll of monumental drums, and then
bang, another crackling flashbulb, the air charged
with electric prickles. Walter comes over, lounges
next to me and shares the light show. When
I turn, there's that serious-edged smile of his,
solemn eyes that seem to see everything. To break
the silence I ask, "Ever hear that old song, *Oh,*
Shenandoah?" I sing a few notes, a few wordless notes.

*

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A few more, as we veered among the shifting vistas
of Skyline Drive in bright morning sunlight,
Milky Ways of wild daisies waving from roadside,
white and gold dots against windblown grasses.
Most worries seemed trivial up there on the blue
rooftop of Virginia, the "mother of presidents."
Conversation turned to poetry, that year's
paramount topic since things I'd written were now
appearing in print, the hoped-for endorsement
at last conferred. I didn't grasp how rare
his *a priori* support of the fantastic
project was, while I soldiered on without much
worrying about income, seconded by him,
an architect in the line of Wright and Kahn.
When we came down from the Blue Ridge, it was only
to push on to Charlottesville, the university
and another celebrated hill outside town, site
of our most versatile president's house.
The estate implied to some of its visitors
that those ideal, white-elephant fantasies
Americans have always had a weakness for at times
come true as shrine of beauty or cradle of thought
that then sets forth to revise the status quo.
Guided change, I mean, since nothing,
in any case, ever stays the same. Even us.
We had two more years until dividing forces
clearer to me now than they were then sent him
elsewhere. But a quality of wordlessness
is still within reach, present in the snapshot
before me right now, and still emitting energy.
Hands on hips he smiles, standing beneath
frozen hands of the clock set over the door
of the domed house that has become the house we share.

(Henry Barstow in a field outside Front Royal
watches his son Billy tote the .22 he gave him
for his birthday. Safety's on, but the boy isn't
easy with it, clearly. He's just ten, an only child.
Henry's own twelve-gauge is like an extra trusty limb.
A little target practice and the boy'll feel handier
with his rifle. Morning sunlight flickering with wind
in the distant hickories. Billy stops and stoops down

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to see something. "Look, Daddy, a butterfly."
Swallowtail flits up in the light, the boy smiles
at him. "It was drinking this pink flower." Nods
and says, "Let's keep moving, we've got a ways to go."
Yes, there's no better land anywhere. Henry plans
to turn over the farm to his boy one day, but maybe
Billy ought not to farm, no money in it. Hateful
what the world's become, lot of crooks running things.
If he sells up they'll just turn his farm into
a development. But what if he was forced to? Why,
Granddaddy'd climb out of his grave and knock him
cockeyed. Six generations on this farm. Well,
he probably won't have to. A redtail hawk floats
overhead. There. A likely stump to shoot at –
but where's Billy? Oh. Running up and holding out
a little bunch of wildflowers. "Here, Daddy, I picked
these for you." Billy's face changes when he stares
at him. "We don't have time for those, Son." Boy bites
his lip, looks down at the flowers. Henry has to choke
back the temptation to get mad, knows he shouldn't,
but, God, he doesn't want his son to turn out like that.
Life is hard enough and he cares for this boy more
than he knows how to say. "Here, Son, let's get some
practice with your gun." Bends down and takes it,
Squats behind the boy. "Hold it like this." Stiffly.
"See that stump?" No answer. Then Billy turns around:
"Daddy? I'm scared." Their eyes lock. Who is more afraid?
In deep distance, a short blast from a train whistle,
the rush of eastbound wheels on steel, a gleam of light
across the miles; and the gritty taste of disappointment.)

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

It was the season of the panel discussion in the New York art world. I've lost count of how many were organized, on themes ranging from the new abstraction to the feminine in painting – not anything to do with gender, it turns out. I suspect that all this talk is a function of the depressed state of the art market, which makes both successful and marginal artists feel anxious. Coming together more or less formally helps to alleviate some of the anxiety, but there's another aspect to these public discussions. Most of the participants are not critics or theorists but artists, apparently eager to define the issues they find most compelling in making art. Yet more often, they seem driven by a wish to control how their work is perceived, declaring themselves to be simultaneously makers, interpreters, curators, and critics of their own work, rather than trusting it to come across in its own terms. It's curious, although, I suppose, hardly new. When Whistler sued Ruskin over that famous hostile review – the one about throwing a pot of paint in the public's face – the angry artist declared that since the critic was incapable of making a painting himself, he was not entitled to an opinion; only an artist could judge art. Many current practitioners subscribe to an even more extreme version of this idea: only the creator of a work of art knows how it should be seen and understood. This is frequently allied with the belief that a work of art cannot speak, disturb, or seduce without an explicatory text. (Mind you, a great deal of the art that springs from these assumptions *doesn't* come across without text, but that's another matter.)

Such notions were pervasive at one of the better symposia, organized by the Triangle Artists' Workshop in March. Dedicated to "questions of standards, values, and criteria," it aligned three artist-critics, one artist-organizer, two unhyphenated artists, and a "writer-critic" from a truly amazing variety of points of view. Everything from anarchic Neo-Dadaism to militant feminism to good old-fashioned connoisseurship had its champion. There was little common ground, but less acrimony and counter-thrusting than might have been expected, and the event was counted a success. An overflow audience paid close attention to the proceedings and afterwards seemed enthusiastic about everything, as though each listener heard only what he wanted to hear, the point of view that reassured him. (Only one person I talked to said, "It was like

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the kind of conversation you have just before you get divorced.")

The past season's exhibitions had some of the same flavor: extreme diversity with virtually no common thread – retrospectives of modern masters and young hot shots, opportunities to reevaluate the doyens of the 1960s, introductions to the unknown and the aspiring – comprising painting, sculpture, photography. Maybe it was just a typical season in New York, but its rhythms seemed more syncopated than usual. Perhaps that was because one of the most spectacular shows of the winter was the large one of works by Stuart Davis, that master of jazz rhythms and harmonies, at the Metropolitan Museum. I admit I am not an impartial observer, since I was one of the contributors to the exhibition's catalogue, but even for those of us who have spent years of our lives searching out works by Davis and thinking about him, the show was thrilling. Being confronted by the full range of this persistent modernist's work – from the Ashcan School realism of his youth to the jazzy, all-stops-out improvisations of his maturity – was as exciting to old Davis hands as to those who were discovering for the first time how good he was.

The show assembled key works from Davis's career of more than half a century, from early figurative pictures to seminal Cubist-inspired works to all of his crucial *Eggbeaters* of 1927-28, which were among the most radical abstractions made in American at the time. All of his little-known murals were on view, along with most of the serial paintings of his last years, when he rang changes on images that had preoccupied him since the 1920s, like a jazz musician letting loose on a familiar tune. What seemed to strike visitors most forcefully was the duration, seriousness, and variety of what would now be called Davis's "enterprise." At every point in his long evolution, there were first-rate, apparently atypical paintings that suggested he easily could have pursued many other directions and been just as good a painter as the all-American, homegrown Cubist we know, but the hallmarks of a powerful individuality were equally visible. So was his obsession with the urban vernacular, with modern city life in all its forms. Striking, too, was Davis's inventiveness as a colorist; the superheated Fauvist palette of his first modernist paintings is no less surprising than the chalky pastels of his earliest Cubist works or the tightly disciplined, dazzling hues of his last years. Anyone who saw this show was grateful to the exhibition's curators, Lowery S. Sims of the Metropolitan Museum and William C. Agee (who probably knows more about the evolution of American modernism than anyone alive).

A far smaller show of Gaston Lachaise's sculpture at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in February was, in some ways, as much of a revelation as the Davis retrospective. The most familiar works of this emigré Parisian, who moved to New York in 1906 at the age of twenty-four and became part of the American avant-garde, are his streamlined, pneu-

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matic nudes balanced on tiptoe, larger-than-life goddesses that encompass Art Deco stylishness, voluptuousness, and formal adventurousness. At Salander-O'Reilly, a few key works of this type, both large and small, served as a context for the show's main emphasis: a remarkable body of lesser known sculptures chiefly from the last years of Lachaise's life, 1930 to 1935. These flagrantly sensual pieces test the limits of traditional figure sculpture in terms of both form and content. The stylish Amazons of the late teens and twenties become aggressively cropped near-abstractions of breasts, thighs, buttocks, and hips. Often, the explicitness of these sculptures is shocking, their unequivocal subject matter all but overwhelming. But in the best, once we get past recognition of body parts – admittedly an important part of how we see these works – Lachaise's inventiveness is manifest. His conception of sculpture is primordial; the essential lump of matter is transformed momentarily into an equivalent for opulent flesh, but it threatens to sink back into inarticulate matter once again. When Lachaise is at his best, as in the astonishing, enormous earth mother, *Mountain* (1934-35), he is powerful indeed. Many of the works in the show were unfamiliar, some wholly new, having been left in plaster at the time of Lachaise's death and posthumously cast, under the supervision of the Lachaise Estate, for this exhibition. The show raised engaging questions about the difference between male and female perceptions, and the difference between male and female image-making. More important, it changed forever the way most of us will think about Lachaise.

It made me think slightly differently, too, about William Tucker's work. Like Lachaise, Tucker, at least recently, conceives of sculpture as a self-contained mass, a kind of updating of the traditional monolithic "statue." Yet where Lachaise makes us read image before we pay attention to form, Tucker makes us gradually discover a host of alternative readings in his abstract volumes. I have sometimes been troubled by the way Tucker's images shift scales apparently at will and ignore conventional logic, much as I respect him as an artist and thinker. (His book, *The Language of Sculpture*, is required reading for anyone who cares about art.) Tucker's drawings, seen at David McKee Gallery in April and May, suffered from none of these problems. Rather, their enriching ambiguity – as opposed to instability – seemed to clarify what the sculptures aspire to. The drawings were based on a series of tiny, hand-sized bronzes that turn the act of squeezing and shaping matter into something utterly visible and literally tangible. The drawings enlarged the intimate bronzes many times over, in turn making explicit the shifts implicit in Tucker's larger sculptures, which may explain why their scale seemed so right. No metaphorical transformation, just a literal one. Most sculptor's drawings are renderings of the buildable, depictions of possible constructions. Sur-

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prisingly, the drawings in Tucker's current series exist only as gatherings of line and tone on the surface of the paper, disembodied masses that momentarily coalesce into suggestions of form – perhaps human, certainly sensuous – and then subside. His earlier drawings, which related to his wood-and-steel constructed sculptures, solemn rings with intervals measured off by projections, were often remarkable. The recent series is no less so. evidence of how fruitful and provocative Tucker's dialogue with the monolith continues to be.

Not long before Tucker was born, at just about the time that Lachaise was reinventing the traditional monolithic figure, David Smith, a generation younger, was assimilating and enlarging the notions of what sculpture could be proposed by Picasso and Gonzalez in their constructed metal heads and figures. This new tradition of open, often geometric metal-working caught on rapidly in this country (far more than in the Europe of its origins), to the point where modernist construction came to be all but synonymous with adventurous American sculpture. Few practitioners, however, were of Smith's towering ability, a fact made plain, once again, by even the relatively modest exhibition of his sculpture and drawings, from 1951 to 1963, at Knoedler Gallery in May and June. The strongest works were a selection from the *Agricola* series, "domestic-scale" sculptures that are among the most overtly Picassoid of Smith's oeuvre. Each work incorporates a fragment of a recycled farm implement or farm machinery, but where Smith habitually subsumed such fragments to their new context, largely erasing the memory of their original function, he allowed his scraps of actuality more autonomy than usual in the *Agricolas*. Perhaps because of this dual role of their component parts, the series seems particularly improvisatory and casual, friendlier and less highly strung than much of Smith's work. For example, the untitled study for *Agricola I* (1951), with its outstretched "arms" and blade-like "head," is animated, alert, and agitated, rather engagingly, in contrast to the watchful stances of the upright, self-contained *Tank Totems* that followed.

It's always nourishing to see works by Smith, and the inclusion of a fine selection of drawings added to the impact of the show. With the exception of a couple of rather inert spray drawings, they exemplified the moment when Smith stopped making images of sculptures that he might get around to building one day and when he began to make compositions of lines and touches of ink that could exist only on paper. This is not to deny the intimate relation between the drawings and the sculptures of the fifties and sixties, but while each illuminated the other, in the context of the exhibition, each seemed to exist only in terms of its own medium. The sculptures in the Knoedler show looked extremely fresh

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and undated – and as innovative as when they were first shown, I suspect. They looked physically fresh, too, with patinas and paint in mint condition, which raises the question of how Smith's fragile painted surfaces are being maintained. While it is good to know that the sculptures are being lovingly cared for, it is still startling to see a polychrome sculpture of 1962, an expanding flare of narrow steel hoops (described by a perceptive painter friend, with merciless accuracy, as "the Balenciaga"), looking as shiny as if the paint hadn't dried yet. An even larger work, *Anchorhead* (1951), with extensive passages of Smith's characteristic scumbled, layered brushstrokes, looked equally clean, the superimposed dry strokes as clear as on the day they were painted. Have these works been repainted, and, if so, who is imitating Smith's wrist?

One of the most talked about shows of the season was the Terry Winters retrospective, from mid-February through early May, organized by the Whitney Museum, following its showing at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Why did the Whitney devote an entire floor to ten years of work by an artist born in 1949? According to the exhibit's curator, Lisa Phillips, Winters is important because he is unlike the Neo-Expressionist and Neo-Conceptualist members of his generation. He is, we are told in the show's catalogue, "one of a small international group who have continued to make abstract painting a credible enterprise for the late twentieth century." That abstraction needed permission to continue is peculiar enough, but so is the rest of the text, which describes Winters as using "organic forms to depict an intimate, quietly ecstatic natural world that serves as a metaphor for his own artistic evolution. With its technical virtuosity and psychologically loaded imagery tempered by historical self-consciousness and ironic reserve, his work has helped to carry abstract painting into a new domain." Putting aside the evident contradiction of an abstraction that depends upon a depicted natural world, let alone "imagery," psychologically loaded or not, the question remains: does the work support either the thesis or the hyperbole? I think not.

Whatever else one can say about Winters, it's hard to think of him as an abstract painter, since his imagery is unequivocal. He enlarges, more or less verbatim, the kind of thing found in natural history texts and anatomy books – spores, cells, the fruiting bodies of fungi, cross sections of organs – depicting them with a heavy hand and a possibly deliberate but noticeable *lack* of the technical virtuosity vaunted in the catalogue. His drawing is so haphazard that it's sometimes hard to decide whether we are faced with a spore, a blastula, or a soccer ball. That one wonders at all about identities, rather than accepting an evocative ambiguity, strikes me as a failure of intention. Winters has a feeling for paint, for inflections of surface, but painterly nuances often seem to exist indepen-

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dently of image or even of his pictures as a whole, odd as that may sound. Maybe that's the point. With rare exceptions, he can't put a picture together. Images are jammed, drift, or simply sit on backgrounds, offering no convincing reason why anything should be anywhere. Scale isn't the problem, since smaller pictures suffer from the same problems as large ones. Winters is probably right to stick to his habitual monochrome earth tones, since the few chromatic canvases in his show were remarkably undistinguished. Anyway, everyone in the late eighties knew that murky pictures were much more serious and hence more important than those with spectrum color.

Despite the catalogue's claims to the contrary, Winters's pictures have much the same effect as those of his contemporaries whose strategies he is supposed to reject; his work is portentous, bombastic, arbitrary, bland, and surprisingly lacking in presence, its large size and self-important gestures notwithstanding. I kept thinking about Stuart Davis, whose first retrospective exhibition was organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1945 when the artist was fifty-two. Arguably, his best work was still to come – the large, intensely-colored explosions of staccato patterns and words, like the Whitney's taxi-yellow *Owh! in San Pao* – but he had already produced a body of complex, idiosyncratic pictures that set a standard for American artists of his generation. Winters is ten years younger than Davis was in 1945. Almost certainly, his best work is still ahead of him. The Whitney would have done well to have waited at least a few years longer.

Winters is not alone in his fascination with natural forms, as at least two recent exhibitions made clear. "The Metaphysical Landscape," an extremely diverse group show in March at Art in General, brought together a large number of younger artists who use images of the natural world, literally or freely, for ends ranging from the aesthetic to the metaphorical to the political. The quality of the work was as varied as the approaches, but the intensity of the participants' concern for the world around them, for its appearance and its ecology, was almost always clear. No matter what the result, the choice of imagery seemed anything but arbitrary. Some of the artists in "The Metaphysical Landscape" were seen in January and February in a three-person show at the Marymount College Gallery. Of these, I found Sue Johnson's "Decompositions" most convincing. Like Winters, she uses specific images from scientific texts but transforms and radically alters their meaning by recombining them as improbable hybrids. A series of Johnson's drawings in "The Metaphyscial Landscape" made her methods plain: not-quite mirror-image two-headed "creatures," fused as if they were playing-card figures, seemed like diagrams of a new natural history. The best of Johnson's paintings use this principle, but less overtly, so the hybridized images

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overlap and fuse, while retaining some of their original character. Johnson can overload her images, to my eye, expending too much energy on rendering. She is better when she lets go, as in a brushy snake head cum exotic flower, flattened against a stylized but painterly geometric background, like a heraldic insignia for the deadly and the fragile.

Among the surprises of the winter was the large exhibition of Bill Traylor's work at Hirschl and Adler Modern in January. Traylor is that rare thing, an authentic naif who makes art that requires no apologies. Born into slavery around 1854, Traylor began to draw at the age of eighty-five, when he stopped working as a field hand on the plantation where he was born and moved to Montgomery, Alabama. There, he slept in the back room of a funeral parlor. A young Montgomery artist, Charles Shannon, found Traylor drawing in the street and began to provide him with materials. For the next five years or so, Traylor produced a series of economical, elegant silhouette images of carousing figures, fierce dogs, mules, horses, people and their houses – a vivid evocation of Southern rural life. He had un unfailing sense of placement and an equally unfailing eye for the telling detail: the swell of a hip, the angle of arms placed akimbo, the tension of an extended finger, the set of ears or a tail. The emblematic patterns of his birds and animals sometimes recall Inuit prints, but more often they are immediate and original. At his most powerful, Traylor is capable of pictures that recall the best of *art brut* Dubuffet in their wit, simplicity, and deceptively pared-down naturalism. The monograph on Traylor by Frank Maresca and Roger Ricco, published by Knopf last year, which reproduces many of Traylor's strongest pictures and includes an interview with Charles Shannon about his friendship with the artist, should help to make this American phenomenon known to a wider audience.

The Traylor exhibition introduced a virtually unknown artist. The installation of Barnett Newman's monumental sculpture *Zim Zum*, at Gagosian Gallery's Soho space in February and March, presented a previously unknown work by a well-known figure. Executed at the end of Newman's life, with the assistance of the sculptor Robert Murray, *Zim Zum* is a series of zig-zagging vertical plates, suavely proportioned, arranged like a pair of overscaled folding screens. The roughly welded seams are like structural equivalents for Newman's celebrated painted "zips." *Zim Zum* seemed far more personal and poetic than the familiar *Broken Obelisk*, which has always struck me as a kind of corporate homage to Brancusi's *Endless Column*. *Zim Zum* is not so much an object as a highly charged site. From the outside, it evokes hidden, sacred places, like the holy of holies at Mecca, shrouded with its dark veil. Passing between the two staggered planes suggests some solemn, ritual act.

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There's none of the terror provoked by a Serra of the same scale, but rather of mystery and the possibility of transformation. The sculpture looked fresh, intelligent, and unexpected – rare qualities these days, especially in Soho.

Equally fresh and intelligent, and just plain beautiful, was a group of Morris Louis "veils and variations," seen at André Emmerich Gallery. These radiant, disembodied walls of color demonstrated just what an inventive, unpredictable painter Louis could be. Of the veils, *Green Thought*, 1958, was especially seductive, with its nervous, shifting edges and liquid greens welling up from the bottom of the canvas. By contrast, the lush *Monsoon* of 1959 emphasized how eloquent Louis could make a small change in placement; instead of looming up, as most of the veils do, *Monsoon* floods its blues, violets, and blacks down from the top of the canvas, to create an image that is all at once confrontational, declarative, and lyrical. Other pictures explored eccentric structures or pared down the veil to a few vertical bands of inspired color. One vertical picture, whose two sides – one a wash of transparent tomato red, the other orangey-red – were separated by a swelling bar of unpainted canvas, was a lesson in economy and unexpectedness. It was a pleasure to see these pictures again and particularly instructive, in light of all the "cool," anonymous abstract painting being hyped these days.

Another pleasure of the spring was the small Fairfield Porter show at Hunter College's Leubsdorf Art Gallery in April and May. Drawn only from works donated by the artist's estate to the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, New York, where Porter lived and worked from 1949 until his death in 1975, it was nonetheless an adequate overview of typical pictures: portraits of friends and family, New England and Long Island landscapes, and a fine little self-portrait, all bearing witness to Porter's individual way of rendering form and space with boldly placed planes of subtly inflected color.

The world Porter chose to paint was deliberately circumscribed, but the way he painted it taps into the whole long tradition of broad, painterly figuration, dependent on nuances of light – that line that goes from Velázquez to Manet to early Monet – and translates it into a wholly American vernacular. I'm not suggesting that Porter is as good as Velázquez or Manet or the young Monet, but he consciously aspired to their standards and their conception of what a painting can be, albeit domesticated and modernized. When he is good, he is very good indeed. A deadpan 1971 portrait of a seated girl, for example, all silvery grays and pale fleshtones, is lifted out of the ordinary by the way the girl's blue shirt locks into the blue distance, seen through a window whose mullions frame and contain her upright form. It's all effortless and *right*.

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How different from a labored, sour pair of large paintings from 1973, two versions of a young girl playing a guitar in an interior with a Christmas tree. (The second is no improvement over the first.) But a 1969 view of the Amherst College campus pits the potential banality of autumn foliage against an equally banal view of a parking lot, complete with cars, and empty lawn. The generosity of rendering, like the unprepossessing view, transforms the picture. A tiny figure, walking across the lawn, further defeats expectations, warping the space of the painting slightly and making us look more attentively.

It was interesting to see the Porter show soon after John Heliker's exhibition at Kraushaar Gallery in April. Heliker, like Porter, has focused for virtually all of his long life as a painter on the world of his everyday existence: friends, the interiors and table tops of his house in Maine and apartment in New York, a particular stretch of shoreline and cliffs, boathouses and porches, all rendered utterly familiar by years of experience. Heliker filters these landmarks of his daily life through memory, and perhaps as a result, his pictures have the tremulous, half-glimpsed quality of a dream or an elusive recollection. They are, paradoxically, both assured and diffident paintings, vibrating with the artist's sense of what he has called "infinite possibilities," yet for all their refusal to commit to firm edges or unbroken planes, Heliker's best works are distinguished by an underlying firmness of structure, an almost classical sense of orderliness. I liked most in the show two pictures notable for their clarity and relative solidity: a vertical portrait of a young fisherman and a large Maine interior with several figures, including Heliker himself. The deliberate ordinariness of the subjects notwithstanding, there was considerable drama, in the contrast between the young fisherman's alert pose and Heliker's staccato, delicate touch, and within the large multi-figure interior, in the tension between that touch and the way the edge of a table carved out space for everyone to inhabit.

Heliker's color, once uniformly cool and blue, as though the seaside light of his Maine island had permeated every aspect of his existence, has been heating up in the last few years and become more surprising. Brick reds and strange lavenders flicker through the best of his newer works, held in check by a limitless range of tinted grays. It's a slightly chalky, fresco-like palette that makes the air in Heliker's pictures seem palpable, illuminated by slanting light. A selection of watercolors and drawings, seemingly casual notations of unimportant, everyday activities, reinforced the impression of seamlessness between Heliker's life and art. From what I know of Heliker's practice, these, too, are probably done from memory rather than from direct observation, but they convey a powerful sense of immediacy; this is how life ought to be lived, even if it isn't. Neither Porter's nor Heliker's art is going to change the course of art

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history, but the work of both painters is deeply felt, beautifully crafted, and obviously made with the conviction that good art matters. These are important qualities, and they come across without an explicatory text.

Coda: Spring was ushered in by a pair of excellent sculpture shows at André Emmerich Gallery and at Baldacci-Daverio Gallery, in conjunction with the Rayburn Foundation. Emmerich presented a fine assortment of small-scale works by modern and contemporary masters, along with some strong younger sculptors. A wiry David Smith reclining figure of the 1930s coexisted happily with a pair of Anthony Caros, a lush little Maillol nude, a Degas horse, a surprisingly good Henry Moore reclining nude, and arresting recent works by James Wolfe and Willard Boepple. At "A Short History of Modern Italian Sculpture," in the section of the show at Baldacci-Daverio, there were necessarily a few familiar names and sculpture types – Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), for example, along with the obligatory Manzu cardinal and Marini equestrian figure – but the majority of works were, I suspect, new to most American viewers. Medardo Rosso's blurred "Impressionist" heads are rarely seen here and Arturo Martini's elegant blend of classicism and expressionism is only just becoming known; an elongated male torso in terra cotta, seen from the rear and provocatively cropped, was one of the show's highlights. Surprises abounded: an early Marini nude, less stylized, earthier, and more powerful than the ubiquitous riders; a Pericle Fazzini boy with seagulls, precariously balanced, which rescued it from the brink of sentiment; and little-known works by Antonietta Raphael, including a tender "mask" portrait and an astonishing compressed figure group, *The Escape* (1958), which echoed both Camille Claudel and Renaissance images of Aeneas bearing his aged father from the ruins of Troy. The contemporary section of the show at the Rayburn Foundation was less unexpected but held some surprises: Ettore Colla's cage-like steel column, for example, and Leoncillo's expressionist ceramic still life of 1953. Seen in light of their immediate ancestors, Mimmo Paladino's and Sandro Chià's sculptures revealed the origins of their distinctive manners. The presence of the past in general, of course, permeates even the most modern of modern Italian sculpture, like a hereditary genetic defect that can either remain dormant or surface to the detriment of the inheritor, but overtly or not it is demonstrably there. Hyper-elegance, softness, over-refinement are potential dangers for modern and contemporary Italian artists, but as this exhibition demonstrated, the best build on the past instead of being oppressed by it. The show was an auspicious begining to a new season.

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BOOKS

Is the French Revolution Over?

A CRITICAL DICTIONARY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. Edited by François Furet and Mona Ozouf. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Harvard University Press. $85.00.
LA REPUBLIQUE DU CENTRE. By François Furet, Jacques Julliard, and Pierre Rosanvallon. Calmann-Lévy. 89 FF.

For the past two centuries, French historians and intellectuals have been debating a problem of paramount importance to them, the national identity of France. Given the turbulent, dizzying succession of the Old Regime, three revolutions, two restorations, two empires, and five republics, it is not surprising that the French have been perplexed about the nature of the social contract that binds them together. In America, nationhood is taken for granted. Americans implicitly understand that the national union of tens of millions of citizens, all with diverse backgrounds and beliefs, is based on the universal acceptance of our eighteenth-century democratic political institutions and an almost religious faith in the document that towers above them, the Constitution. But in France, a combination of the lack of stable political institutions and an enduring cold war between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries has made it impossible for the French to achieve the kind of political consensus necessary for a clear sense of nationhood.

At least this was true until 1989, when a group of French historians, led by the distinguished François Furet, declared that a consensus had, in fact, at last been found. "The Revolution is over," they declared, meaning that the divisions that had characterized political life in France since the Revolution had finally been healed. France has emerged from its past and become a republic in which virtually all factions - revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries - are united in a new political center.

In *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, the French cultural historian Pierre Nora lucidly explains that, since the Revolution, there have really been two French nations - one embracing the traditions and loyalties of the *ancien régime*, the other those of the Revolution. The national identity was torn between the old France and the new France, Catholic France and lay France. Indeed, for two centuries France was divided culturally almost as much as politically. Nora points out that left and right signified much more than political orientations; they also re-

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ferred to vastly different conceptions of the country. He emphasizes that "these are not rival forms within a shared consensus but exclusive and antagonistic images of the nation itself. Each part of the nation, believing itself to be in sole legitimate possession of the whole, has sought to kill off the other." In fact, Nora interprets France's most important modern political experiences as reflections if not products of these old, enduring divisions. Vichy, he maintains, cannot be fully understood without taking into account its counterrevolutionary inspiration, nor can the Popular Front or the election of Mitterrand be explained without reference to their Jacobin heritage.

Nora also suggests that the French have always longed for strong leaders who could create not only *political* order but, even more important, the illusion of *historical* order, who could "patch the torn robe of the nation's past and make one nation and one history out of two." Looming above the vast and largely forgettable assortment of kings, emperors, presidents, and prime ministers two great figures stand out - Napoleon and Charles de Gaulle - for both were men whose visions of France and her history enabled them to reconcile in their governments and in their persons the two opposing camps in modern French history.

Although Napoleon could claim to represent popular sovereignty at the same time that he provided charismatic leadership, he could not produce an enduring solution to the problem of historical disunity and political instability. The French had to wait for Charles de Gaulle to install the stable system that would definitively reconcile these two antagonistic political trends. As François Furet reminds us, it was de Gaulle who created the "monarchical republic" that after two hundred years wed the Old Regime and the Revolution. De Gaulle's Fifth Republic offered the nation a strong leader who governed through plebiscite rather than through parliamentary procedure, a change appreciated especially by those who remembered the post-World War II Fourth Republic for its instability and governmental powerlessness. However, as Furet remarks, the success of the Fifth Republic depended on its ability to forget its founder. In this it succeeded, inasmuch as François Mitterrand, once highly critical of the monarchical characteristics of the Fifth Republic, finds himself the chief beneficiary of de Gaulle's "democratic monarchy." That Mitterrand was able to rise above the failure of the socialist policies of 1981 and remain in power, when his party could not claim a majority of voters, is probably testimony to the strength of his own personality and political skill.

The essence of Furet's and Nora's vision of contemporary French society is a nation no longer organized around the old conflicts and old categories. Not only has this new executive power brought together the

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ancien régime and the Revolution; even the Catholic Church, long the bastion of counterrevolutionary sentiment, now too has been integrated into the mainstream. Furet sees evidence of this in changed attitudes toward the question of education, an explosive issue that has always been the center of the conflict between Catholic France and lay France. In his illuminating book, *La République du centre*, Furet recalls the mass street demonstrations in France in 1984 protesting the elimination of Catholic schools. Catholic education evoked not the influence of a reactionary church on young French minds but rather the possibility of diverse educational institutions. Interestingly, Catholic education has come to represent freedom and choice. Furet envisions the Church incorporating the values of the republic and the republic being able to tolerate the influence of the Church. The entire nation, and the Church along with it, has moved toward the political center.

Thus, for Nora and Furet, the national obsession with the Revolution and the antagonisms that have defined French political life have finally come to an end. Now there is a fresh sense of national identity and political unity in France, created by new conditions such as remarkable economic growth and prosperity, the decline of the Communist Party, a Church and a right wing that accept the legacy of the Revolution, and the exercise of power by the left under the aegis of the Fifth Republic. Furet contends that French national identity today depends less on healing old divisions than on surviving the assimilation of France into a politically and economically united Europe.

How ironic that such deep and longstanding political disunity was the direct result of a Revolution that worshipped unity. Two enemy camps were the inevitable outcome of the Revolution's radicalism, its refusal to incorporate into its institutions and myths any meaningful references to France's historical past, its determination to deny the values and beliefs of a significant segment of the population. In a sense, to understand the French Revolution and its consequences is to understand its fetishistic and ultimately murderous cult of unity. This is clear in the stunning and monumental *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*. In many of its ninety-nine essays on Events, Actors, Institutions, Ideas, and Historians of the Revolution (the exemplary table of contents, lucidly and imaginatively conceived, is alone worth the price of admission), written by two dozen of the world's most eminent historians of the Revolution, the ominous theme of unity surfaces again and again.

Surely the Revolution's downfall can be traced to its fatal obsession with unity, oneness, unanimity, an obsession as central to the Revolution as it was mysterious and irrational – all the more incomprehensible to

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Americans, whose Revolution incorporated the opposite principle of diversity. Indeed, one of the most striking differences between the American and French Revolutions was the tolerance of diversity of opinion in America and the antithetical, radically intolerant myth of unanimity in France. In America a government was created that institutionalized competing interests; in France, dissent was defined as treason.

We have only to turn to two great eighteenth-century French philosophers, Montesquieu and Rousseau, to fathom the abyss separating the two concepts of Revolution and politics. Montesquieu offered a moderate, complex, and wise vision of how things are; Rousseau insisted on a vision, necessarily extremist, of how things ought to be. Montesquieu emphasized the idea of the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. But Rousseau's fatal gift to the French was the ideal of a people, magically united, wholly at one with its government. In England, as Mona Ozouf points out in her essay on Liberty, Montesquieu discovered that chronic conflict among King, Lords, and Commons, the perpetual oscillation of force and counterforce, protected individuals from arbitrary encroachment. Powers, interests, and passions held one another in check, and in that impediment liberty found its opportunity.

The failure of the French Revolution to appreciate the genius of Montesquieu's concept of *power limited by power* was its fatal shortcoming. As Bernard Manin remarks in his essay on Montesquieu, the French never accepted this philosopher's principle of the non-concentration of power. They could conceive of a balanced system only either as allowing for a superior power to be the arbiter of conflicts or as labor divided - different and complementary tasks assigned to the different branches. "Absurd" was the word that Condorcet used to describe the institutionalization of opposition between organs. A system of cooperation and organized unity seemed evidently more logical and preferable to a system of checks and balances.

The French also rejected the concept of bicameralism: the English model evoked for them an empowered aristocracy, and the American model seemed insufficiently radical, unduly influenced by the English tradition. At his trial, Brissot's words of praise for the American Constitution and its federalism were enough to convict him, and Lafayette's efforts to celebrate the achievement of the American Revolution also came to naught. Montesquieu's name was rarely mentioned - Sieyès and Condorcet relegated him to the hapless class of "moderate people who would like to proceed toward the truth one step at a time." The French believed that they had no need of models; Rabaut de Saint-Etienne declared: "French nation, you are not made to receive examples, but to set them." And set them they did. Twentieth-century revolutions have claimed the French Revolution, not the American, as their model, and

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the unfortunate results have been all too painful.

Division and balance of power in England and America, unity in France. The French Revolution's answer to the good sense of Montesquieu was Rousseau. The Revolution was all his from the beginning, for, as Mona Ozouf asserts, only Rousseau "abandoned all consideration of what was possible." Rousseau's originality, and the basis of his concept of government, lay in his strange vision of the nation as a *collective being*. His idea was that heterogeneous individuals could be transformed into a unified society through the absolute submission of every individual to the "nation," the nation conceived as a single, unitary, *collective person* who had one mind and one will and an infallible will at that. As the American historian Keith Baker phrased it, the Revolution transferred sovereignty from the natural person of the king to the abstract, collective person of the body of citizens as a whole. And just as monarchical sovereignty was expressed through the unitary will of the king, the will of the sovereign nation had to be as unitary as it was inalienable. "By this logic," Baker notes, "unity was the condition of sovereignty; the nation was unanimous or it was nothing. Hence the constant aversion to any form of political activity that threatened the unity of the sovereign will." The myth of a sovereign collective being to whom belonged an infallible "general will" replaced the old monarchist myth that the king's body was the body politic and that "the king can do no wrong," but the new myths, although the product of the Enlightenment, were just as magical and supernatural as the old ones.

Twentieth-century political theorists have wrestled with the question of the intellectual origins of the ideology of unanimity that forced the elimination of dissent and gave birth to revolutionary government in all its lawlessness and terror. Albert Camus, Jacob Talmon, Hannah Arendt, and others have pointed to Rousseau not only as the Revolution's mastermind but as the father of totalitarianism. Yet in his essay on Rousseau, Manin attempts to exculpate Rousseau. He credits Rousseau with the idea that the people are one, possessed, like an individual, of a single will, but he insists that Rousseau played no part in the Revolution's treatment of political adversaries as enemies, arguing that "of course the 'revolutionary government' and the subordination of individual rights to the general will *could* have been justified with the aid of the *Social Contract*. The fact remains that they were not." For my part, I find Mona Ozouf's characterization of the revolutionary cult of unity as the "rotten fruit of Rousseauism" more to the point.

The Rousseauian idea of a united and indivisible Republic implied that the Convention and the Convention alone, inasmuch as it represented the will of the nation, must govern. And this absolute primacy of

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the legislature implied revolutionary dictatorship. For revolutionary government, according to Furet and others, rested on a pyramid of equivalences: the people = the Convention; the Convention = the Committee of Public Safety; the Committee of Public Safety = Robespierre.

Like the French kings before him, Robespierre came to represent, if not incarnate, sovereignty; he alone was the guardian of the mythic unity of France. He ascribed no legitimacy whatsoever to dissent and viewed organized minorities as factions obstructing the general will of the nation. The Jacobins were the one exception. They claimed to be the sole representatives of the sovereignty of the people. They never conceived of themselves as a party at all. They saw themselves as different from all other factions; they alone were the sentinels of direct democracy, guardians of the people's inalienable will. "The Jacobins," Furet writes in his article on Jacobinism, "represented the revolutionary myth of the people. In other words, a people unanimous by definition and therefore subject to constant self-purification designed to eliminate enemies hidden within the body of the sovereign and thus to reestablish an imperiled unity."

There is no doubt that unity could be achieved only by way of exclusion. In his discussion of the differences between the French and American Revolutions, Philippe Raynaud comments that whereas in America factions were tamed by assigning them a recognized place in the institutional framework, the French sought to neutralize them through submission to the "general will." The Rousseau-inspired rejection of any "fundamental law" superior to the will of the sovereign and the distrust of "factions" were a lethal combination that logically led to and justified the lawlessness of the Convention and the violent elimination of dissent. The law on suspects that permitted the purge of all elements of disunity represented not only the essential logic of the Terror but the essential logic of the Revolution's concept of a sovereign unitary people.

Of course, people can be terrorized into unanimity, but can they also be coaxed into it? Can independent and skeptical individuals be convinced that an imaginary "general will" has precedence over their own wills? This problem, Mona Ozouf comments, was as difficult for the Revolution to resolve as it was for Rousseau. Nevertheless, the Revolution came up with a solution: the concept of *public spirit*. "Having granted the individual his full rights, the Revolution had to find a way to bring him into step with the community, to couple *absolute liberty* with *total obedience*; they hoped to create a collective spirit so powerful that it could subjugate the individual spirit completely." Thus the relatively benign concept of "public opinion" was shunned by the Jacobins who found the term, Ozouf tells us, too suggestive of subjectivity and

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liberty. They preferred instead the more homogeneous and coercive term "public spirit." The triumph of "public spirit" over "public opinion" was a dearly bought victory.

Of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*, only *égalité* seemed to survive and flourish in the political and moral climate of the Revolution. Especially if equality is viewed as the product of the annihilation of a social class, it is undoubtedly easier to achieve than *liberté* - which requires institutions that guarantee individual freedom. Fraternity fared no better. The myth of equality produced a "prison-like concept of fraternity." According to Ozouf, group closure was indispensable to the sentiment of fraternity. "As the Revolution progressed and as it excluded more and more people, some of their own volition, others not, this dream (of fraternity) became increasingly difficult to sustain. 'Every Frenchman is today your brother, until he openly shows himself to be a traitor to the fatherland.' In that 'until' - intended as a threat - we already see the assumption that aristocrats are excluded from fraternity. People began to resign themselves to the fact that fraternity was not for today." Ultimately, fraternity was coupled with terror, because the group had the right to eliminate real or potential traitors.

Furet and Ozouf reach the same conclusion that illegality was necessarily consubstantial with the Revolution. Robespierre in fact had emphasized that a revolution cannot be carried out without recourse to illegality. Ironically, as Furet asserts in his essay on Revolutionary Government, it was precisely at the point at which revolutionary government had become lawless that it was most faithful to its concept of the absolute and indivisible sovereignty of a unique assembly, chosen by universal suffrage to represent the general will.

And so the cheering in 1989 was not in commemoration of the Revolution but rather in celebration of its belated demise. Just as the Fifth Republic weds the principles of monarchy and Revolution, the French electorate, Furet contends, has also moved toward the political center. The great majority of French voters and their leaders now occupy a relatively limited space at the center of the political spectrum. The revolutionary left and the counterrevolutionary right no longer have real roles to play in the political life of France. Furet contends that Gaullism, having achieved its mission, has become as irrelevant on the right as the French Communist Party on the left. As for the extreme right-wing Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which garnered an ominous fourteen percent of the vote in 1988, to Furet this is a new phenomenon, tied not to the old counterrevolutionary tradition of the Action Française and Vichy but rather to new problems of immigration, insecurity, and industrial modernization: it is the "pathology of the new

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France."

And yet, despite the new national harmony, Furet is ambivalent about the new centrism which seems to indicate the depoliticization of a country in which passionate political debate had been as common as good wine. In *La République du centre*, Furet and Pierre Rosanvallon in fact lament the decline of Gaullism as well as French communism, for the old conflicts gave meaning to the debate over political ideas and the political future of France. Their disappearance leaves a void. The ideology of the center is, at least for now, vague and nameless. The new France has few political passions; instead, there is a taste for well-being and an interest in the growth of the economy. The Revolution is over, and the French have turned their attention from *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* to *prospérité*.

However, underlying Furet's disenchantment with the depoliticization of France is another fear. Furet and especially Rosanvallon suspect that the new centrism is but a modern disguise for the old Rousseauian, romantic myth of national unity. Consensus, they warn, still implies the politics of exclusion. For Rosanvallon, the idea of consensus can be only antidemocratic and a vehicle for exclusion and polarization. Indeed, Furet argues that the rise of the Front National between 1981 and 1983 was a reaction to the Mauroy government's policy of excluding the right. The longstanding desire or need of the French to experience (or fantasize) their nation as mystically One rather than as democratically plural may still undermine respect and tolerance for political debate and compromise.

The only consensus that should exist, Rosanvallon concludes, is an agreement as to the *form* of government, not its political complexion. Agreement on the system means that the system is no longer the source of conflict but rather that it can be used to regulate conflict, that political conflict may be acted out, according to rules, without violence, and that the majority and an opposition respect each other and alternately share power. The French Revolution will truly be over when these shining ideas are fully appreciated around the globe.

SUSAN DUNN

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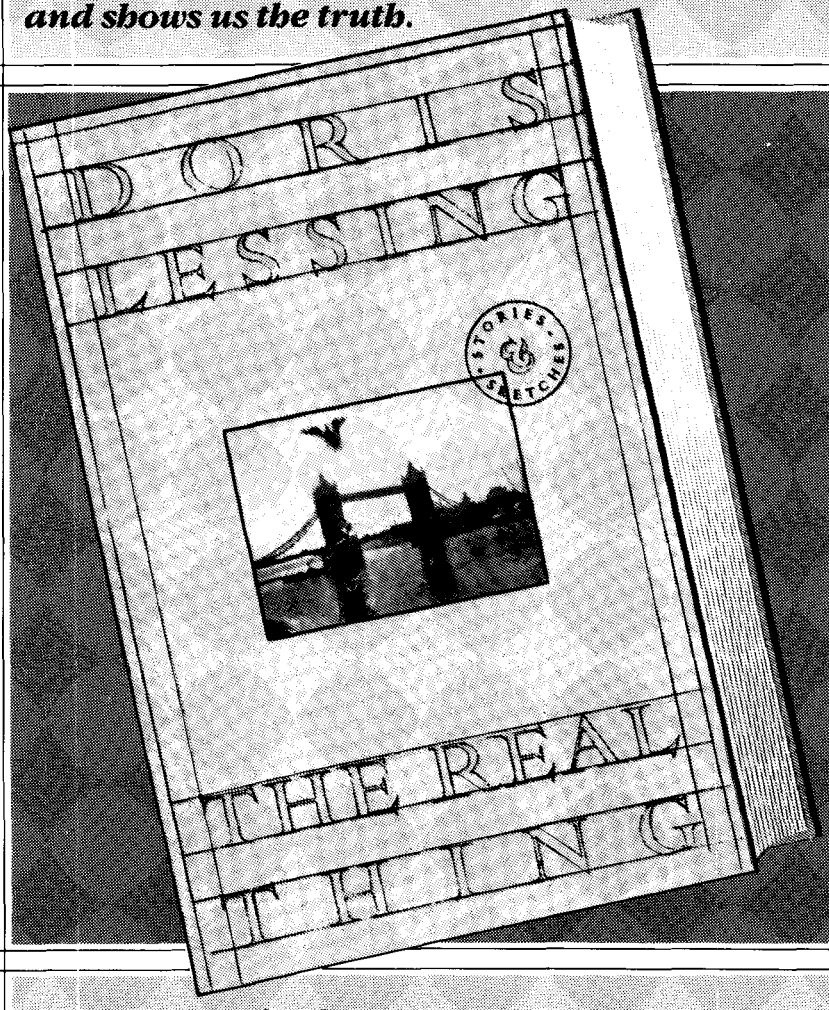

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Nostalgia for the Infinite

THE COMPLETE POEMS OF ANNA AKHMATOVA: POLNOE SOBRANIE STIKHOTVORENII. TWO VOLUMES. Translated by Judith Hemschemeyer. Edited by Roberta Reeder. Zephyr Press. $85.00.

Since the eighteenth century, poetry has been central to Russian culture in a way that has baffled and made envious poets in the West, especially American poets. It has been a public force that has helped shape the characters of generations. Against a background of political tyranny, the relatively privileged but always precarious and dangerous space of Russian poetry has gathered to its oasis the thirsty national spirit. "You see how important poetry is in our country?" Osip Mandelstam asked his wife. "Where else do they shoot people for it?" In America, where poetry has been virtually marginalized out of the public domain, there is an understandable hunger, if not for the infinite, then for some assertion of poetic presence. American poets have cast envious eyes on the long shadows of their Russian peers, not always mindful of the martyrdom that has been the price. A number of our poets have thus leaped to the translator's task, working only with "trots" and a dim knowledge of Russian poetic traditions. But in this ample, even luxurious, two-volume edition of the complete poems of Anna Akhmatova, with the original Russian text and English translation on facing pages, we have a contrary example of long and dedicated devotion to a task.

Translator Judith Hemschemeyer tells us in her preface that she spent ten years learning Russian, studying the cultural background and literature about Akhmatova, as well as proceeding scrupulously through the Russian poet's considerable lifetime output of verse. Hemschemeyer, out of necessity, I suppose, eschews rhyme, although inventive and precise rhyming is one of the characteristic features of Akhmatova's style. She attempts to retain Akhmatova's meter, not always with complete success, while frequently abandoning the length of Akhmatova's line. A considerable and fairly successful effort is expended to find good English equivalents for tone, diction and idiom. Intonation and stress – important features of Akhmatova's well-known dramatism – are less successful. Outright mistakes are rare and insignificant. The result is a readable translation, for which the reader with less than native fluency in Russian will be grateful. But it will be very difficult to tell, on the basis of this translation alone, which among Akhmatova's poems are strong stylistically, and which relatively routine.

Roberta Reeder, a scholar of Russian literature, has contributed a long, informative, intelligent (if somewhat plodding) account of

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Akhmatova's life, poetic career, and place in the cultural history of her time. She draws heavily (with full acknowledgement) on the work of Amanda Haight, as well as on that of Lidia Chukovskaia and Nadezhda Mandelstam, for a sense of Akhmatova's personal history. Something more might have been done with the discrepancy between these two authoritative accounts. Chukovskaia's tone is hagiographic. Mandelstam, concerned primarily with the image of her husband who was Akhmatova's close friend, is sometimes warm and affectionate, sometimes respectful, but occasionally spiteful, even malicious, and while the great woman and great poet Akhmatova is certainly there in Mandelstam's pages, there is also a bit of the "foolish, fond old woman." Reeder is familiar with the major scholarly and interpretive works on Akhmatova - especially those by Eikhenbaum and Zhirmunskii - and conveys something of their significance. Volume Two contains a fascinating account by Sir Isaiah Berlin of his 1945 visit to Akhmatova and two essays by the poet Anatoly Naiman, Akhmatova's private secretary in her late years. There are also many wonderful photographs of Akhmatova and some of the locales significant to her poetry, but some of their details are blurred. The referential indexing of the second volume is awkward, with references sometimes to the Zhirmunskii, sometimes to the Struve-Filipoff editions. The set has the rather pleasing aspect of a kind of family album, and must have been quite expensive to produce. Zephyr Press, a very small publishing house, is certainly to be commended for taking the risk. (It will shortly issue a paperback edition of the volumes to be priced at $24.95.)

The venture is dedicated to one of the great poets of our century. "Anna Akhmatova" - the name is already a lyric statement, the five broad "a's" an extended sigh. She was born Anna Gorenko in 1889. Because her father, a nobleman and naval engineer, told her in her teens that he didn't mind her writing but wished she wouldn't besmirch the family name, she took the name of her maternal great-grandmother, a descendant of Genghis Khan.This very European young lady, whom Modigliani a bit later would walk across Paris to sketch, liked the name's associations with the steppe and Islam and the Tatar horde. She valued, too, her associations with the Ukraine and the Black Sea, its rugged wildness and connections with classical antiquity, as well as the magic and witchcraft Russians imputed to Ukrainians. The poet Nikolai Gumilev, her first husband, called her "a witch from a serpent's nest in Kiev." But her true "native soil" was St. Petersburg, where her father's profession had taken the family early on. They went to Tsarkoe Selo, the Imperial summer residence, site of the famous *lyceum* which Pushkin attended and immortalized, a place of parks and palaces, byways and secluded ponds, and numerous delicately extant Pushkin haunts. Petersburgers regarded

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people from Tsarskoe Selo as stylish and elegant. On the eve of the Second World War, looking back on her life there over the divide of the Revolution and long years of grief and some glory, she referred to herself ironically as "the gay little sinner of Tsarskoe Selo."

Her early poems, however, were not exactly jolly. Their characteristic motif was passion recollected, not in tranquility, but rather in controlled sobriety and with augmented being. They were short and clear, with strong rhymes and structure, and lent themselves to memorization. Indeed, they were frequently and popularly memorized by both men and women. In the years between the revolutions (1905 and 1917) she was the rage. The surface of her poems was always clear - she did not "experiment," nor was she avant-garde or obscure. She conveyed emotion not through invocation or direct expression, but through the precisely observed description of an "objective correlative," a gesture, a locale, a fragment of a dialogue, a rich allusiveness and intertextuality that hinted at greater depths, and brought to Russian lyric poetry some of the qualities of the Russian novel. For lyrical personae she used on one occasion a peasant woman, on another a fairy-tale heroine, sometimes an Anna Karenina who did not commit suicide, sometimes a Grushenka who hung on to the onion. She created a poetic mood and tone that had very many imitators, as well as a prototypical soulful Russian woman who multiplied herself not only in poems but in real life as well. "I taught women how to speak," she later wrote, somewhat ruefully; "Now I wish I could teach them to stop."

For all its density, Akhmatova's verse is clear, and few of the poems require exegesis. Yet in understanding them one must grasp her relation to and sense of identification with the city of what was then Leningrad, over which she claimed to cast her shadow. Kornei Chukovskii wrote: "In general, all of Leningrad, with its squares, canals, rivers, is so closely linked in my memory with the poetry of Akhmatova, that for me, as for many readers, Leningrad is inseparable from her." Here, two things need to be said: first, that Leningrad, including the St. Petersburg of its prerevolutionary past, was not only a city of squares, canals, rivers, and impressive architectural ensembles; nor was it simply the former capital of Imperial Russia. It was also a symbol of an exceptionally painful, violent, bloody, most often repressive but nevertheless creative, and ultimately liberating historical process we can call here, given the need for compression, "the Europeanization of Russia." It figured in classical Russian literature, from Pushkin to Dostoevsky, as a city of nightmare and hallucination, of fissure in the individual soul and extreme polarization in society, and at the same time as the city of the last end, Babylon and the New Jerusalem in one.

Secondly, for Akhmatova the city retained its symbolic significance

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not only after the transfer of the capital back to Moscow, but after its name change in 1924. Neither Soviet degradation during the 1920s and 1930s, nor the wholesale death and ruin caused by the Second World War and the nine-hundred-day siege, could destroy its legend. Mandelstam, whose sense of identification with the city had once been as strong as Akhmatova's, gave up on it, and called it, after 1925, "an ordinary Soviet city." Nadezhda Mandelstam said in 1974 that for her Leningrad had become simply a museum for tourists, a mausoleum. For Akhmatova, however, a museum was where at some future time the muses might still kick into life, a memorial place that needed to be kept intact and authentic, even if only in words. Unlike Osip Mandelstam, who died in Gulag in 1938, Akhmatova survived until 1966. Up until the 1960s she gathered about herself a group of young peots. Some of those whom she tutored, encouraged, and nourished, like Joseph Brodsky and Dmitry Bobyshev, differed from her in their talents and styles. These poets and the others in the group came to be known as "Akhmatova's orphans," and continued the "Petersburg theme," giving it an even more "Akhmatovan" twist by adding more irony to it.

Today, Akhmatova's reputation depends much less on her poems of helpless subservience to her two "masters," passion and the muse, than on what Brodsky, in the brilliant essay included in his book, *Less Than One*, calls her role as "the Keening Muse," the poet of Russia's great sorrows and losses. This mode begins with her poems of the First World War in which "I" becomes "we," and the prevailing tone is that of lament. In Hemschemeyer's translation of "July, 1914," for instance, Akhmatova laments:

> Low, low hangs the empty sky
> And a praying voice quietly intones:
> "They are wounding your sacred body,
> They are casting lots for your robes."

Among these poems of grief for suffering Russia that appear with greater frequency in her work from this time on, three long ones stand out: "Northern Elegies," "Requiem," and "Poem Without a Hero." In these poems, "the shadow of passion and songs soon vanished from my memory." They were inscribed instead in the "grim book of calamity."

"Northern Elegies," a cycle of reminiscent lyrics, evoked the St. Petersburg-Leningrad of different epochs, from the 1890s on, with great atmospheric verisimilitude and an overall tone of somber reflection, an exceptional account of the "dark city on the dread river." "Requiem," now Akhmatova's best-known work, depicts and is dedicated to the women who stood in line outside prison doors to await news of hus-

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bands, sons, lovers, arrested without warning in the middle of the night. Her brilliant younger contemporary, Konstantin Vaginov, turned from poetry to satiric prose after the revolution. Adopting the tone of a Petronius at the end of Empire, he chronicled in his novels *Goat Song* and *Bambochado* the shift from "St. Petersburg" to "Leningrad" and what it entailed for the suffering intellectuals beset by and unable to cope with the vulgarities of power. Akhmatova's approach, for all its irony, has a grimmer sobriety.

Hemschemeyer's translation of "Poem Without a Hero" is superior to previous English versions, and Reeder's notes – though some irritatingly explain the obvious, others repeat what has been noted elsewhere, and a number of mysteries are left unresolved – are on the whole genuinely helpful in tracking down the many references to Akhmatova's personal life and to her reading. In this edition Akhmatova's *poema* gains needed explication as well as a readable translation. The Russian word *poema* means not simply "poem," but a long poem with a narrative core, harking back to the epic. It is characteristic of the modern *poema*, however, to be very much lyricized. In the Russian title, *Poema bez geroia*, the first letter of each word forms the acronym "Pbg," which for Russians evokes the old abbreviation for Petersburg. It is indeed a "Petersburg Tale," as its subtitle indicates, and the tale provides a vessel into which the mature Akhmatova pours her very complicated feelings about the city.

The poem begins with a vision that came to Akhmatova while she was living in the Sheremetev house on the Fontanka Canal in 1940, in a small bare apartment carved into one of the most beautiful buildings in Leningrad. A year before the Second World War engulfed Russia she recalled a scene that had taken place in 1913, the year before the outbreak of World War I, when, as she put it, "the real, not the calendar Twentieth Century" began. The scene involved the suicide of Sergei Kniazev, a young poet then in cornet's uniform, who killed himself for the unrequited love of Akhmatova's friend, the beautiful actress and dancer Olga Sudeikina. Akhmatova describes a highly stylized world, with mirrors and masks, musical motifs, muted references to the theatrical and ballet life of the time (shades of Stravinsky's "Petrushka" and Chaliapin and Anna Pavlova's "dying swan"). The masquerade of elegance and frivolity is interrupted by the vain death of a talented but immature boy, with the poem's perspective deepened by the author's naming of the coming disastrous battles of 1914 and 1915. The second part of Akhmatova's *poema* takes place in January 1941, a year after her first vision and in the same place. It is the winter before the summer of the *second* World War, and Akhmatova broods over her editor's rejection of

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her manuscript, her literary isolation, and her aforementioned vision from the time of "the fall of the Roman Empire":

No one knocks at my door,
Silence guards silence,
And the mirror dreams only of the mirror.

Brooding over her rejected lines about 1913 and the *commedia-del-arte* tragi-comedy of Petrushka-Pierrot and Columbine that her socialist-realist editor cannot accept, her muse unexpectedly stirs:

But the hundred-year-old charmer
Suddenly wakes up and wants
To play. It has nothing to do with me.

Broad heroic gestures of the Romantic type – Byron putting the torch to Shelley's funeral pyre – are out of the question, she realizes. And yet, the muse promises:

"You and I will feast together
And with my royal kiss
I will reward your midnight malice."

Part three of the *poema* begins with a description of the Sheremetev house during the siege. Akhmatova has been evacuated to Tashkent. From there she vividly imagines the city of Leningrad under fire. All is desolation and despair. She is a thousand miles away, and yet:

Our separtion is imaginary:
We are inseparable,
My shadow is on your walls,
My reflection in your canals . . .

Describing her own flight to Tashkent, she invokes an image of the political prisoners who preceded her eastward, including her own son:

. . . the road
Down which so many have trod,
Down which my son was led,
And that funeral procession was long
Amidst the festive and crystal
Silence

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Of the Siberian land.

Filled with the literary echoes of both Russian and European culture, as befits a Petersburg tale, worked and re-worked, there is nevertheless something unfinished about this last great poem, something that links the cultivated, frivolous world of elite St. Petersburg, sunk in narcissism but dimly aware that its time is coming to an end, with the desolate Leningrad of 1942. Akhmatova kept working on it, and it is to the credit of the editors that they have included the large number of fragments that the poet added to or subtracted from this extraordinary work from 1940 almost to the time of her death. The demarcated text is the one she confirmed during her visit to Oxford in 1965. Yet it is good to have nearby in one volume the fragments that surround it, for I think there is no last word, and the poem stands open – like the imaged relationship of the Petersburg of 1913, the ruined Leningrad of 1942, and the "museum-city" of 1965 and today. St. Petersburg, quintessentially self-conscious, Dostoevsky's "most intentional city in the world," which continually ponders its past, is a city whose end has by no means arrived.

SIDNEY MONAS

Eyeless in Gaza

GAZA. A YEAR IN THE INTIFADA: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT FROM AN OCCUPIED LAND. By Gloria Emerson. Atlantic Monthly Press. $19.95.

The Gaza Strip is a sad and grim place. Almost 650,000 Palestinians, the majority refugees, live packed together on a thin slice of shoreline, twenty-eight miles long and five miles wide, sandwiched between Israel and Egypt. Although a number of prominent Palestinian leaders hail from the Strip, including Yasser Arafat of Fatah and his political rival Sheikh Ahmad Yasin of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Gaza's favorite son is, undoubtedly, the Intifada.[1] On December 9, 1987, four

[1]Arafat's birthplace, like so much pertaining to him, has been mystified. At various times, it has been cited as Gaza, Jerusalem, and Cairo.

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Gazans died after an Israeli truck plowed into their car. The demonstrations and rioting which erupted in Gaza's Jebalya Camp after the accident soon spread throughout the occupied territories, finally coalescing into a full-fledged rebellion. Since that time, the Strip has achieved such a reputation that many Israelis, soldier and civilian alike, say "Lekh le 'aza" ("Go to Gaza") instead of the traditional "Lekh le azazel" ("Go to hell"). In a recent army scandal, an Israeli officer became so annoyed with his men – who refused to volunteer for an arduous training exercise – that he threatened to send them to Gaza as punishment.

The hell in Gaza is what the first-time visitor notices most: the absurdly fat and bold rats, the fermented mountains of uncollected trash, the gut-wrenching booms of tear-gas grenades. Gaza as hell makes a sexy story, but this depiction is always simplistic and incomplete.[2] Gaza is a world wrought with ambiguities and contradictions. In the streets, the ubiquitous Mercedes taxis dodge camels, donkey carts, and stone-proofed Israeli jeeps. Posters of Rambo and blonde-haired girls praying to Jesus adorn the walls of houses constructed so that their cinderblock components spell out *Allah* in six-foot letters. The women, veiled from head to foot in black, sew, sort lentils, or watch the gyrations of belly dancers on Egyptian television and the travails of Krystle on *Dynasty*. Everywhere the air is pervaded by the peculiar olfactory cocktails of dung and spice, of night-blooming jasmine and tear gas. Gaza is difficult to bring into focus and even harder to compose.

During the early days of the Intifada, there were many curfews. Sometimes the electricity would be cut off, and the family we lived with would sit around a candle and listen to "Radio Monte Carlo" or Um-Kulthum or odes to Molotovs sung by local bands turned up loud enough to drown out the grandmother's cries of "Oh Lord! Oh Lord!"

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[2]Gaza has long been presented as hell. Antigonus and Ptolemy, it is recorded, fought a bloody duel in Gaza with ancient tanks called elephants. The Emperor Hadrian brought many of the Jews captured after the failed Bar Kokhba Revolt to Gaza for Roman-style entertainment. One could quote from the *Chronicon Paschale* which speaks of the mangled remains of Christians being thrown to the beasts in Gaza during the time of Julian the Apostate. During World War I, the English and the Turks fought a vicious battle in the Strip which left the banks of the Wadi Gaza littered with corpses. Fifteen thousand men died in two gruesome days, neither side having gained an inch. One can also find Gaza presented as a little paradise on the edge of the desert, a garden of mulberries, fairs, wine, and pseudo-Messiahs. Although now extremely puritanical, Gaza was, at various times, something of a fleshpot with a temple dedicated to the fish-god Dagon, a very naked statue of Venus in the central Square, baths said to equal those of Paris. As late as 1917, a British soldier prophesied in *Palestine of the Jews* that Gaza - specifically Khan Yunis - would someday boast "a fashionable watering place," featuring a "Philistine golf links' over the dunes."

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Grandmother had been married at the age of twelve and, shortly thereafter, had become blind. Perched in a nest of pillows and old blankets, she nevertheless knew everything that went on around her. She was a midwife, also adept at potions and cupping. One of the greatest proofs of her power was that "once even a Jewish had come to her" in order to become pregnant.

On such nights, our friend Yusuf - who as a child had lost all vision in his right eye and most in his left at the hands of a local doctor - would request that we read aloud T. S. Eliot or entries from Cowie and Mackin's *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* such as "scratch out," as in "Be careful, Harry, she'll scratch your eyes out if you so much as glance at another woman." On other such nights, the history of Gaza would be retold in parts. Yusuf's mother Im-Ali recounted for us the "Massacre of '56." The Jews, she said, had rolled into Gaza in tanks, flying Algerian and Iraqi flags. The Gazans cheered from their rooftops, believing that the Arab armies had come to liberate their land. To their horror, they discovered that they had been duped. The Jews, Im-Ali said, marched over one thousand Gazan men in front of the old Turkish fort and mowed them down with machine guns. Later, they built a latrine over the mass grave. Im-Ali's husband had escaped this fate by hiding in a water-tank.

The Israelis invaded Gaza once again in 1967. Yusuf had been only a child then, but he still has vivid memories. One day, he said, he had wandered out to the street, where he saw round things rolling in the dust. When he looked closer, he realized they were human eyes, staring up in unblinking witness. "What do you as a foreigner think of this?" he asked. As so often, the query was at once a test and an appeal. To express disbelief or even skepticism is to prove yourself an enemy. More importantly, it is seen as a rejection of the Gazans themselves, who live for their history, a mythic combination of tragedy and loss, which explains their present condition and at the same time provides hope for their future redemption. To deny their history is to deny their being. Once, we inquired about the chihuahua-sized rats that wreaked havoc every night among the chickens and ducks and sometimes ran across people's faces while they slept. Before '67, we were told, there had been only little mice, not rats like these. One night, the Jews had come in big trucks and let them out at the gates of Gaza. No one doubted the veracity of the story. There had been many eyewitnesses.

There have been few extended eyewitness accounts of Gaza, and there are only a few books written in English devoted to Gaza. Martin Meyer's excellent *History of the City of Gaza* was penned at the turn of the century, as was G. F. Hill's translation of Mark the Deacon's *Life of*

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Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza. Downey's *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century* attempts to chronicle Greek-Christian thinkers in the Strip during the Byzantine period. Since the '67 War, there have been several books written on the Israeli occupation of the Strip. These often take the form of eyewitness accounts and tend to be polemical in tone, with titles like *Bantustan Gaza*. Most recently, Gloria Emerson, an experienced reporter for *The New York Times* and the author of a book on the Vietnam War which won a National Book Award in 1978, has written what she calls a "small book" on "an occupied land." The author's stated intent is to provide "a record of the life of the Gazans" during a year of the Intifada. The result, however, is more of a pilgrim's journal to the latter-day Holy Land of Palestinian revolution than an eyewitness account of a political conflict. Like many pilgrims' tales, the work brings the author's internal geography into sharper focus than the land sojourned.

From the very beginning of *A Year in the Intifada*, the reader who knows Gazan history senses a selective vision at work. Emerson quotes from Downey's history the testimony of a "Latin pilgrim," who wrote of Gaza that it was "a splendid city, full of pleasant things; the men in it are most honest, distinguished by every generosity, and warm friends of visitors." Emerson means for the pilgrims's accolade to say something about the Gazans of today, which is all well and good: What seems a bit disingenuous, however, is that she neglects to mention Downey's intent to present sixth-century Gaza as a "cultivated and elegant Greek Christian city" which eventually was "swallowed up by the Moslem expansion." There is no shortage of accounts of the Holy Land which mention Gaza, almost all of which have a bone to pick. Their partisanship, however, is often tempered by insights that go beyond the limpid characterization Emerson quotes. One reads, for instance, that Alexander the Great was almost killed in Gaza by an anonymous stone. The Christian Fabri, who visited the Holy Land in 1483, recorded in his diary that the pilgrims made sure that they arrived in Gaza around nightfall, so as to avoid being stoned by the "little Muslim boys." A British railway official, according to an eyewitness, was killed by a stone in the Arab Rebellion of the thirties when he "foolishly went out in his car to see the fun." In contrast, one British doctor escaped death four times by showing his "passport": he had "the presence of mind to remove some of his clothing and conclusively prove that he did not bear the mark of Abraham's flesh."

Emerson proceeds with a capsule history of the region. "The Philistines were the first Palestinians," she asserts. The Philistines, a non-Semitic people believed to have come from Crete, were invaders of Gaza as were, at various times, the Arabs, the Egyptians, the Israelites, the As-

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syrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Romans, and the Crusaders. The author's use of the word *Palestinian* is here a polemical anachronism, *Palestine* having first been used by the Romans, replacing the name *Judea*. Having covered ancient history, the author skips a full millennium, touches briefly on the occupation of Palestine by the Turks, and brings us to the period of the British Mandate, when Jews first appear, seemingly out of the blue, to "purchase and expropriate Palestinian land." As to any Jewish presence in Gaza before this time, the reader would be excused for thinking that there was none.[3]

Throughout the book, Emerson telescopes history in such a manner that the reader is lost as to why and how Gaza has become what it is. Most relevantly, the reader is not given the facts needed to understand the crucial origins of the ultimately tragic clash of Jew and Arab, Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. The 1947 United Nations partition plan, Emerson writes, would have deprived the Palestinians of "Jaffa, the major Palestinian port." Jaffa, the author should know, was not within the territories allotted to the Jewish state. The infamous Deir Yassin massacre, she claims, was followed by the display of the victims' corpses in the streets of Jerusalem, a claim these reviewers have never come across. The storm of controversy that erupted in Israeli and Jewish society after the massacre is reduced to a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* penned by "some Jews who had fled to New York." In 1948, Emerson writes, "Palestine was destroyed, its people dispersed, its history forbidden and denied by the victors. In that same year Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip." There is no mention whatsoever of the

3Jews have been in and out of Gaza from early times, as attested by a number of coins, inscriptions, tablets, and documents. The very earliest history of Gaza has not been recorded. In the Bible, one of the oldest accounts available, we read that it was to Gaza that the shorn and blinded Samson, judge of Israel, was brought after his seduction by the Philistine Delilah to grind corn in prison till the end of his days. The Philistines, expanding eastward from their coastal cities, and the Israelites, pushing westward from their mountain strongholds, were, from the beginning, rivals. At times, however Israelites participated in Philistine raids. David fled from the jealousy of Saul to the Philistine court of Achish, and later, Philistines served in his bodyguard. In the second century B.C., Judas Maccabeus gained all of Philistia. During the Byzantine peiod, we read that the Jewish Quarter of Gaza was said to be one of the wealthiest communities in the land. The Turkish authorities encouraged both Spanish and Turkish Jews to settle the Gaza, but with the waning of the Ottoman Empire, the Jewish community also declined. Many families fled during the Napoleonic invasion of 1799. By 1811, none were left. Sixty-five years later, Jewish immigrants from Morocco settled in Gaza, only to be expelled during the anti-Jewish riots of 1929. Kibbutz Kfar Darom was established south of Deir el-Balah in 1946, falling two years later to invading Egyptian troops. A Jewish presence was renewed once again when the Strip came into Israeli hands after the '67 War.

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concerted attack on the renascent Israel by Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq which made this possible.

The author seems equally at sea when she discusses more recent events. She bungles the date, place, and particulars of a well-known terrorist attack carried out by a young Gazan against an Israeli bus. Khan Yunis, the second largest city in the Strip, is described as "a small town and a refugee camp near the border with Egypt," which is not even an accurate description of the southernmost city of Rafah. Hamas leader Sheikh Yasin, a grandfather, is said to be "a young quadriplegic." The Lebanon war of '82, Emerson writes, was the result of "the nationalist movement in Lebanon, the strengths of the P.L.O. and their ebullient, often arrogant, behavior." The latter constitues surely a new etiology of the Israeli invasion.

Interested in studying "life under occupation," Emerson lived at Marna House in Gaza City, a hotel "where Westerners and Palestinians may meet on safe ground." The author's isolation there may explain her basic misunderstanding of the dynamics of the Intifada. The majority of Gazans live in conditions of moderate to severe poverty, yet Emerson writes of a local grocery in which customers can purchase bottled water and frozen okra, Kraft French Dressing and Heinz Hamburger Relish. The *shebab*, the "young guys" at the vanguard of the Intifada, burn tires, says Emerson, in order to "make army vehicles detour." As anybody who has witnessed the process knows, it is clear that such acts are calls for confrontation accompanied by catwhistles, curses, and a lot of bravado. If soldiers don't answer the challenge, the result is acute disappointment. The explosion of tear gas grenades and rifles, Emerson writes, produces a "soft plop." Neither can be accurately described as such unless one is miles away from the action. In a book that purports to be a form of documentary realism, such errors cast doubt on the work as a whole. The responsibility of a journalist is, at the very least, to get the facts straight. More important is the sustenance of something like cognitive dissonance. Emerson instead lapses into the laziness of black and white. She presents the complex array of social and political forces at work in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a drama pitting the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness. On the Israeli side, she sees the "small plump general" with the "sharp French face" who treats Palestinians like "animals in the zoo." There is also the Israeli reporter who "possessed a slight hauteur, a barely concealed sense of her own superiority that was not easy to admire." There is the racist "Agent Y" quoted as saying: "There is a problem with the Arabs, a mental problem. It's terrible what I'm saying, but they're basically different from Westerners – it's in the genetic structure." There is the Shin Bet agent who, when a prisoner is brought before him, simply says, "Crucify him."

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Israeli soldiers, Emerson never tires of telling us, are obscene and insolent. They are arrogant, possessing "the greatest swagger that any army ever chose to have." They "clap and hoot" after taking prisoners. "The soldiers loved seeing the casualties and began to clap or whistle as if a celebration was in order." A marksman, afert a "quick success," according to the author, begins "the usual macabre celebration, clapping his hands or yelling with glee over his kill." In the entirety of the book, there are few Israelis who seem human. Emerson presents the Gazans in sharp contrast. She describes Dr. Zakari Aga (Zakaria al-Agha) is described as "massive and magisterial." Even when "facing guests she did not want or like," Alya, the proprietress of Marna House, "always stayed serene but distant, as if royal blood had taught her how to rise very far above it." Yusra Barbari, head of the Palestine Women's Union, is "stern and elegant . . . as if a tutor to a royal family had once instructed her." Her tablecloths and runners "were always of very white linen which looked so pure and immaculate it was hard to imagine them in the dirty cities of America and Europe, to be spotted by ketchup or mustard on dining room tables." This is both pure silliness and a telling triviality, as is the author's romanticization of the fish of Gaza – the fish Gazans can no longer catch because of Israeli restrictions, the fish "whose names Westerners did not know." The fish of the eastern Mediterranean, needless to say, are much the same whether found off the shores of Gaza or the Isle of Capri. The restrictions the author mentions are not only Israeli but Egyptian.

Emerson's tendency towards romanticization often forces her to gloss over or, more commonly, to ignore the "revolutionary violence" literally written on the walls that surround her. At a number of points in the book, she discusses what many Palestinians call their "newspaper," the grafitti that covers not only houses and shopfronts, but also, on occasion, trees, cacti, stones, and bodies. She mentions slogans like "Yes to death and starvation" and, as might be expected, various versions of "The Israelis are not stronger than the Americans; the Palestinians are not weaker than the Vietnamese," but some of the most ubiquitous slogans are ignored. One need not know Arabic to recognize guns, knives, swords, and Molotovs. In and around one of the hospitals in which the author spent a great deal of time, one can find stencilled Kalashnikovs, calls to *jihad*, and messages like "The destruction of Israel is a Koranic inevitability." If Emerson had read more closely the writing on the wall, she would have found there one of the most crucial tensions of the Intifada – the pull between the dream of "the glorious armed struggle" and the realization of the limits of power, between rhetoric and reality, imagination and pragmatism.

Emerson plays apologist of the worst sort when she writes of Hassim,

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a member of the strike forces, the various squadrons of *shebab* responsible for the frequently brutal murders of "collaborators." The details of his "life story," like that of "all Palestinians in Gaza," is "mournful, harsh, sacred." A "big, serious man," he "knew his life was at risk but he could not bear being apart from the intifada. The killing of collaborators was a job for the most steadfast and loyal." Likewise, the Gazan behind the bus incident is described by the author as possessing a face which was "hardly [that] of a coarse, stupid butcher." He was "only a melancholy young man with a good deal on his mind." When the Gazans are not noble revolutionaries, they are reduced to pitiful victims, some of whom, like "the brother of Jamal" – a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine – are killed, "guilty only of having ideas and sharing them." Emerson writes, "No insurrection ever yielded such constant calculations. In Jerusalem and in Washington, D. C., human rights groups worked on the tallies. In Tel Aviv and Chicago, Los Angeles and Cambridge more human rights groups were keeping accounts." The author obviously sees her task as personalizing these statistics. This is an important undertaking, and her failure is regrettable. In the end, *A Year in the Intifada* seems little more than an inventory of victimologies. The reader searches in vain for a man or woman of flesh-and-blood whose existence has been forged between hatred and love, weakness and strength, all the curious mixtures of emotions that make us believable – and perhaps even lovable – to ourselves and others.

By presenting the Palestinian uprising as just another revolution of saints, the author avoids the real and difficult questions that must be asked, particularly now as the big players in the Middle East seem to be heading towards a regional conference and the Palestinians towards autonomy and possibly statehood. Emerson displays no real grasp of what happens between people and peoples locked in a relationship that is always antagonistic but at times strangely symbiotic. Instead of trying to understand the consequences – the fear, the hatred, the violence – that inevitably result as two nations battle over the fate of one land, the author has chosen to paint a Manichaean world of good versus evil. The complexities and sometimes poignant contradictions of Gaza are lost. In these ways and more, Emerson, ironically, has failed most of all the Gazans themselves.

ANNE MARIE OLIVER AND PAUL STEINBERG

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

Edith Kurzweil's "Education without Politics" (PR 1, 1992) and William Phillips's accompanying comments make sweeping generalizations falsely implying that academic leftists are monolithic in their beliefs and behavior. Kurzweil further believes leftists have a "stranglehold on faculty and administrations." Is she claiming this is true at the majority of colleges which, like mine (California Polytechnic State University, where I teach in the Department of English) are dedicated primarily to servicing the business world through job training and research? Is she perhaps referring to that notorious deconstructionist John Silber, to the gang of Afrocentric Marxists controlling the Harvard Board of Overseers and the University of California Regents, to President Hannah Gray of Chicago fomenting antiphallogocentrism from her seat on the board of directors of J. P. Morgan Guaranty Trust and ARCO?

Kurzweil suggests that if leftists "could abandon their ideology for just a few hours a week, they might be able to stop posturing for personal ends." Shouldn't the same appeal be addressed to Silber, William J. Bennett (who hires an agent to publicize his posturings), Lynne Cheney, Allan Bloom, Hilton Kramer, Roger Kimball, Dinesh D'Souza, and the strident leaders of the National *Assocation of Scholars*?

Kurzweil hyperbolically claims that "our American left has been successful in cornering the political discourse" and in "holding on to its role as victim long after it has won the ideological war." Who on the academic left would dream of attaining power at the level of William Kristol as Dan Quayle's chief of staff? His mother Gertrude Himmelfarb is among the conservatives with whom the National Council on the Humanities has been packed under Bush. It is widely acknowledged that under Cheney the National Endowment for the Humanities grant review process has been rigged to shut out leftists. (See Stephen Burd's article, "Chairman of Humanities Fund Has Politicized Grants Process, Critics Charge," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 22, 1992.) In the Carol Iannone affair, the Modern Language Association was savaged in the media for its allegedly political opposition to Iannone's scholarly credentials (consisting mainly of shallow polemical articles in *Commentary* and publications of the National Association of Scholars), but does anyone believe she was nominated for any but political reasons?

William Kristol's father, Irving Kristol, has been both an executive and beneficiary of the Olin Foundation, which is in effect a branch of the Reagan and Bush administrations and spends tens of millions yearly coordinating the ideological war against the left. Moreover, most of the projects sponsored by Olin,

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Scaife, Heritage, American Enterprise, and other right-wing foundations promote the political interests of their corporate patrons – a charge that cannot be made against the sponsorship of left scholarship or journalism by foundations like Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and MacArthur; few among even the most doctrinaire academic leftists are in the hire of special interests.

Finally, Kurzweil and Phillips fail to acknowledge that although some of the accusations rightists have made against some academic leftists may be accurate, many others have been of the straw-man and ad hominem variety, filled with misrepresentations and calculated to provoke polarization. The bare minimum to be expected from those of good will on either side is for them to admit that their side is as subject to error and partisan zealotry as the other.

Donald Lazere
San Luis Obispo, California

Edith Kurzweil replies:

Professor Lazere's letter seems to exemplify, once again, that ideology blinds. Instead of responding to my plea for putting aside political agendas in order to help lift the level of education of our students rather than politicize them, he misquotes me and chooses to repeat again the media discussions, and the slogans, I had hoped to transcend. If, instead, he and his pals were once again to teach English and were to forgive their students for planning to "service the business world" they disdain, American education might not be in the sorry shape it is in and jobs might not be moving overseas.

Neither the students who have been short-changed nor the colleagues who have been silenced are concerned with who sits on boards of directors, or with the "notoriety" of John Silber who, incidentally, has found the time and money to turn around one of the worst public school systems in the country. I also fail to see the connection of what's going on in our classrooms to the genealogy of the Kristol family, to neoconservative politics, etc., or to the fact that foundations – whether conservative or "politically correct" – choose to give their money where they please. (According to a recent survey, the combined assets of so-called liberal foundations are much greater than so-called conservative ones, and *Partisan Review* and I have been turned down by both sides.)

Far from "falsely implying that academic leftists are monolithic in their belief and behavior," as Professor Lazere states, I foolishly had trusted his own alleged willingness to start a dialogue. That I attracted a diatribe instead proves only that he does not want to replace name-calling, and his own entrenched stance, with the intellectual honesty he manages to display in personal correspondence. This disjuncture, it seems to me, is itself a manifestation of the "political correctness" whose existence he denies.

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To the Editor:

The experience gained in the few years since the departure of the "old regime" has demonstrated that the transition to a true democratic order is a difficult path on which dangerous temptations lurk: uncontained national intolerance finally plunged us into a bloody civil war and brought about the painful dissolution of the country. The unrestrained ambition of national leaders, assisted by the shameless efforts of many, among whom were those in the best position to raise their voices against such lunacy, caused the death of tens of thousands of people, the destruction of towns and villages, unprecedented crimes, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and extensive poverty and hunger. A feeling of shame, fear, and helplessness has filled all those who are thinking at all soberly and who refuse to be caught up in the wave of hatred.

Conscious of their intellectual, moral and civil responsibility, a number of writers, artists, and scientists have felt the need for some time to engage in public action and to gather together in a way that transcends the narrow frameworks of the existing political parties and professional organizations. The government's desire to subordinate scientific and cultural institutions, universities, and the media, particularly television, to its short-sighted and risky policies in the name of ostensible national interests must be opposed by a form of association that enables intellectuals to defend not only the right to independent creative work but also basic democratic values.

In establishing the Belgrade Circle as an association of independent intellectuals who in these difficult times have not betrayed the basic principles of tolerance, justice, and truth, we are thus endeavoring to open the space for the reciprocal interaction and collective efforts of all those involved in creative work in the various fields of literature, science, and art – regardless of national, religious, or political affiliation.

The Belgrade Circle will promote the consistent construction of a democratic, secular, and open society, full freedom of thought and expression, the free circulation of people and ideas, and respect for the professional rights of all those involved in creative activities. It will attack the abuse of science, culture, and public speech. The Belgrade Circle is against political trials but will seek to hold accountable those politicians, soldiers, and intellectuals who are responsible for inflaming national hatred, militarizing society, instigating war, crimes against humanity, the destruction of cultural and historical treasures, the displacement of people, and the forced exile of many prominent creative individuals and young intellectuals. Through such activities, the Belgrade Circle hopes to contribute to the creation of a true democratic, political, and intellectual culture.

The Belgrade Circle
Belgrade, Yugoslavia

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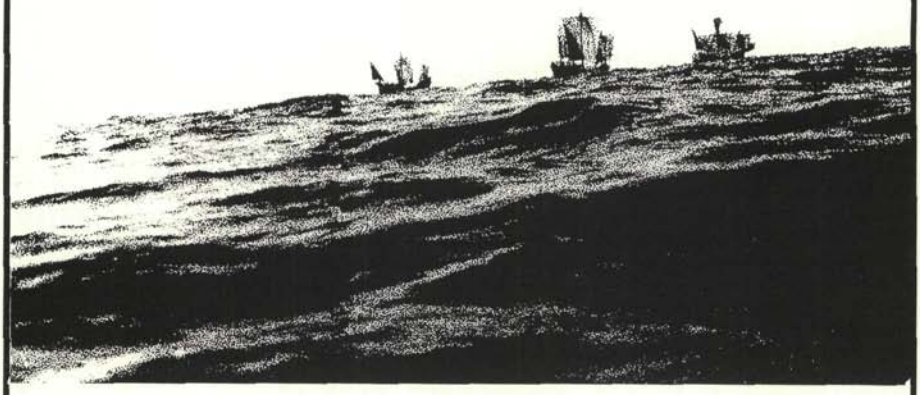

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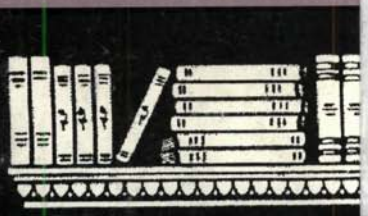

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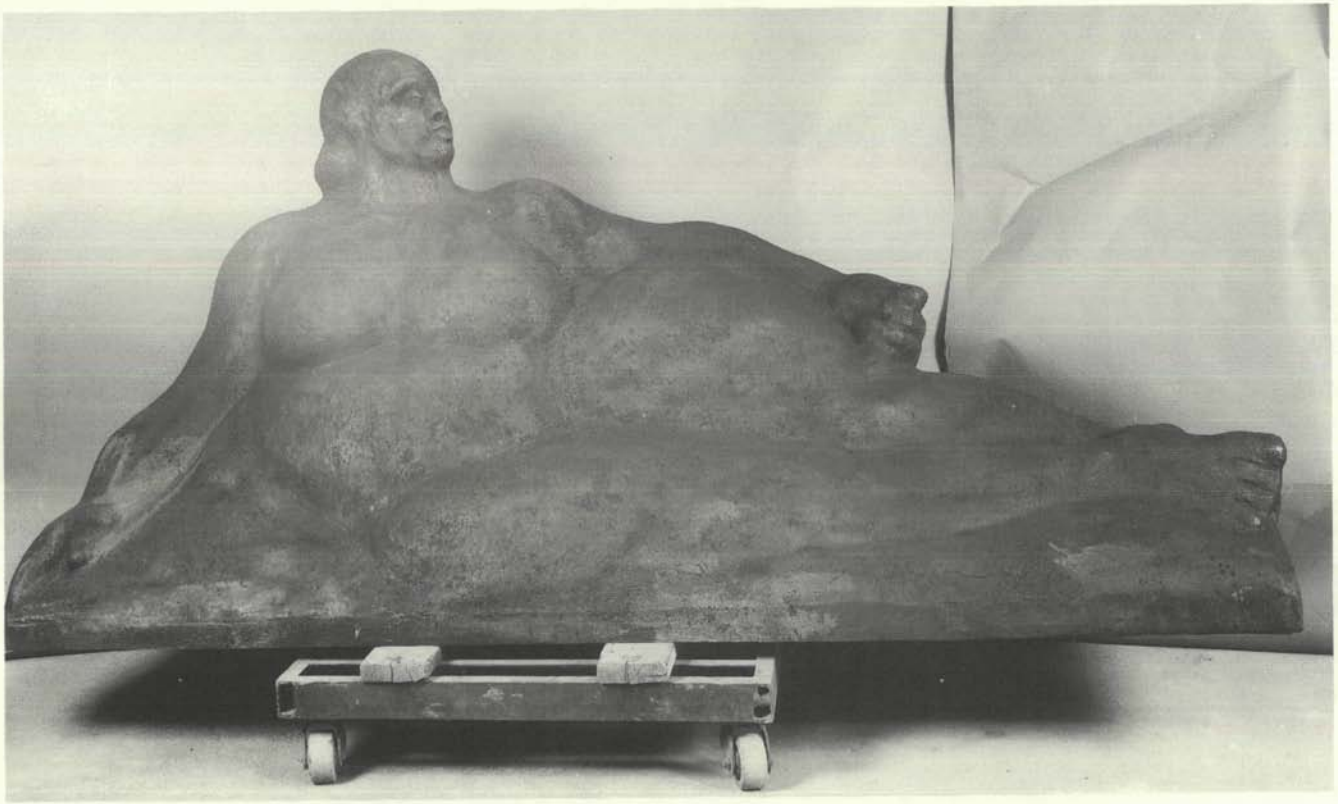

Mountain (1935) by Gaston Lachaise. Bronze. 49 x 102 x 42 inches. Courtesy of Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc.

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Untitled (1990) by William Tucker. Charcoal on paper. 47 x 42 inches. Courtesy of McKee Gallery.

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Agricola VII (1952) by David Smith. Steel and cast iron, painted red. 22 and 7/8 x 13 and 7/8 x 9 and 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Knoedler & Company.

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Construction with Five Figures (c. 1939-42) by Bill Traylor. Poster paint on cardboard. 12 and 7/8 x 7 inches. Courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Modern.

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Portrait of a Girl (1971) by Fairfield Porter. Oil on canvas. 41 and 1/4 x 27 and 3/8 inches. Courtesy of The Parrish Art Museum.

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The Visit II (1989) Oil on canvas. 62 x 60 inches. Courtesy of Kraushaar Galleries.

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